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MARY JANE

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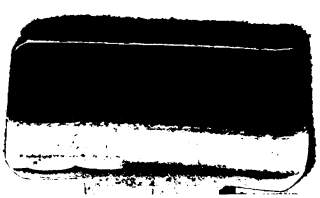

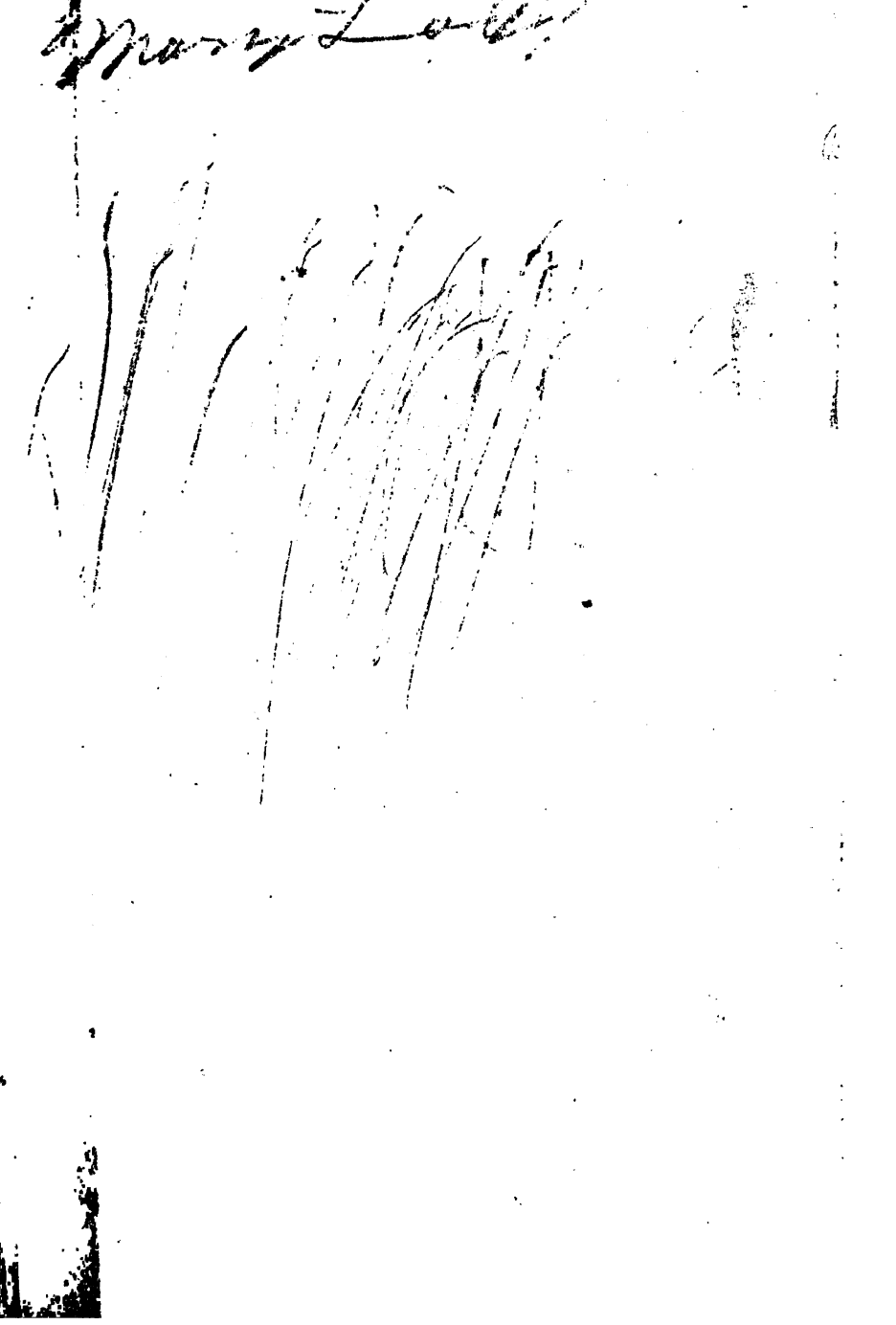

MARY JANE DOWN SOUTH

BY

CLARA INGRAM JUDSON

AUTHOR OF
"MARY JANE—HER BOOK," "MARY JANE—HER VISIT," "MARY JANE'S KINDERGARTEN," "MARY JANE'S CITY HOME," "MARY JANE IN NEW ENGLAND," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY
FRANCES WHITE

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TO
ALICE

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MARY JANE DOWN SOUTH

"ALL ABOARD FOR FLORIDA!"

THE week between the time Mary Jane heard of the trip South and the time for starting seemed unusually short. So short that Mary Jane thought it surely must have had only three days in it—that is, she thought that till she counted up and found to her surprise that this very, very short week had had Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday and now a Tuesday just exactly as all other weeks have.

"But the days haven't been the same, Alice, I just know they haven't," insisted the little girl.

"Yes they have," laughed Alice, "only you've had so much to do and so much fun that you haven't noticed how many hours have gone by—that's the difference."

"I should say we *have* done lots," said Mary Jane, "if that's the matter. I never saw such lots to do—never!"

And indeed it had been a busy week in the Merrill household. On Wednesday of the week before Mr. Merrill had announced that business would take him on a two weeks' trip South and that he would take all the family with him. It seemed such a good chance to give the two girls, Alice, a big girl of twelve, and Mary Jane, a busy kindergartner of five, a glimpse of the tropical part of their country and a better understanding of the geography Alice was already studying and Mary Jane would soon begin.

But a week gave very little time to make ready so everybody had to help. There were gingham dresses from last summer's

wardrobe to get out and let down; each little girl had to have a new bathing suit, for who wants to go South without a swim in the ocean? New hats must be purchased because the velvet hats Alice and Mary Jane were wearing would be very heavy in the warm southern sunshine. Then the house must be shut up for its two week's vacation, and everything must be made snug so that cold weather would do no damage. Mary Jane was so busy helping do errands and getting things out of drawers and closets and helping to pack that it's no wonder she thought the time went quickly.

"Better plan so you can get along without your trunk some days," suggested Mr. Merrill as he came into the house Tuesday evening, "because when we're on the jump as we will be you can't always be sure of getting your trunk every time."

"Then I think I'll have to take another hand bag," said Mrs. Merrill thoughtfully.

"Goody! Goody! Goody!" shouted Mary Jane. She was coming down the front stairs as she heard her father speak and she dashed back up again, hunted out the little black grip she was sure her mother meant to take and began packing.

"She'll want pencils in it, and paper and my Marie Georgannamore 'cause I don't ever have time to play with her when I'm in school," said the little girl as she packed the things. "And rubbers, Mother always thinks about rubbers and—" but by that time Mary Jane was so excited, she piled everything from the top of her dresser pell-mell into the bag, and then hurried down stairs.

"Here it is, Mother," she cried gayly, "you don't have to pack it 'cause I've got it all done—every bit." And she set the bag on the living room table.

Mrs. Merrill glanced at Mary Jane's flushed face and saw how eager she was to

help but that all the excitement and hustling were making her a little tired so she said, "That's the grip I want, Mary Jane, and thank you for bringing it down to me. But before we pack it suppose you and Alice sit down by me and plan just what we want to take."

"Yes, only I want to carry it," said Mary Jane; "I'm plenty bigger 'nough to carry my own grip."

"Why, Mother," exclaimed Alice, "you wouldn't let her carry a grip of her own, would you? She's too little. I'll be the one to carry it."

"I thought you were going to carry your camera, Alice," said Mrs. Merrill quietly, "and one thing for each girl is enough to look after. Suppose going down we pack yours and my things together in the suit case and let Mary Jane have her own toilet things and extra dress in the little grip. It isn't too heavy for her to carry if she must.

Then you can have your camera. Coming back you may not want to take so many pictures. We might pack your camera in the trunk and then you could have *your* things in the grip and take your turn traveling like a lady all alone. How would that be?"

Both girls were pleased with that plan so Mrs. Merrill said she would get just the right things to put in the bags while the girls went to tell their best friends good-by.

Mary Jane's little chum, Doris Dana, lived next door, so she didn't have far to go. Doris was at home and half way expecting Mary Jane because she knew that the Merrills were to leave early in the morning. She pulled Mary Jane into the living room in a jiffy and showed her a big book of pictures she had been looking at. "Look at these, Mary Jane," she cried, "and these and these and these! Mother says you'll see them all down South. Oh, dear, but I wish I was going too!"

Mary Jane had never seen the big picture folder before (her father had promised that she should have one and he was to bring it to her that very evening) and she was as interested as Doris in the wonderful pictures it contained. They spread the folder out on the floor and looked at the big orange trees, the palm trees and the heavy Spanish moss that made every sort of tree look so queer. They looked at rivers and lakes and, most wonderful of all, a family of alligators.

"I like those best," said Doris positively, "and why I like 'em is because they're so awful. I wish I had one, I do."

"Do they really grow that way?" asked Mary Jane of Doris's mother.

"Indeed they do," laughed Mrs. Dana. "I've seen hundreds of them just like that picture and you will too."

"Oh, bring me one! Bring me one!" cried Doris; "will you, Mary Jane?"

Before Mary Jane had a chance to answer the telephone rang and Mrs. Dana took a message from Mrs. Merrill that Mary Jane was to come home at once. So, with a hasty promise whispered in Doris's ear, that she would surely send an alligator, Mary Jane ran skipping across the snowy lawn to her home.

When dinner was over an hour later, Mr. Merrill went to the hall and took from his coat pocket a bundle of railway folders.

"There you are, girls," he said as he laid them on the table; "there are the pictures I promised you. I think you'll find something about every place you're going to visit."

Alice and Mary both grabbed for folders and in two minutes time they had spread them out on the floor in front of the cozy fireplace and were peering through them eagerly. Mr. and Mrs. Merrill, who had taken the same trip before, explained in just

what order the pictures should be put and told stories of their trip.

"Can't we take these along with us?" asked Mary Jane; "that would be fun."

"It might be fun," agreed Mr. Merrill, "but it would also be a nuisance because we'll have plenty to carry as it is. Let's fold them up—it's bed time now you see, girls—and put them in the table drawer here. Then first thing when you come back you can get them out and see if you really saw all we think you are going to."

Mary Jane thought of course she never, never, never would go to sleep because she kept thinking about riding on the train and what she would order in the dining car and her new hat and lunch at the hotel the next day (Mary Jane loved to eat at a hotel) and those queer looking alligators she had seen pictures of and everything. But she must have slept, for in about a minute (or so it seemed) she sat straight up in bed and there

was the sun shining straight on to her out-of-door bed and father out at the garage was locking the door and saying, "There, I guess that's all done!"

She dashed into the house and bathed and dressed in a jiffy. Mother had laid out her things so she put on everything she would wear on the trip except the dress. Of course she wouldn't put on her new traveling dress till the last minute—an old frock would do till then. Just as she was going down the stairs she met Alice coming up.

"There you are," said Alice, "I was just coming up to call you, breakfast's ready!"

After breakfast each person helped and in short order the dishes were washed and put away, the living room tidied and the upstairs set in order. By half past nine, folks were dressed and ready to go. It surely seemed good to get out into the sunshine because with the furnace fire out so Father could be

sure there was no danger of fire, the house was beginning to get pretty shivery.

"Think about the flowers you'll see Saturday, girls," said Mr. Merrill, "and dance around a bit to warm up. The car will be along in a minute."

"Won't we see flowers till Saturday?" asked Mary Jane. "I thought we were going to-day."

"So we are," laughed Mr. Merrill, "but going takes a while. We start South to-night. Then we ride all to-night and all to-morrow. To-morrow night we get to Birmingham. You remember we are going to stop a day with Uncle Will there. All day Friday you'll be seeing wonderful things in that city. Then Friday night we'll get on a sleeper train again and Saturday morning we'll be in Jacksonville."

"And there's flowers," added Mary Jane.

"Just so," said Mr. Merrill.

"And alligators?" asked the little girl.

"Oh, lots of alligators they tell me," laughed Mr. Merrill. But just then the traction came along so Mary Jane didn't have a chance to explain her plan of bringing alligators home to Doris, which was perhaps just as well, for Mr. Merrill had plenty to think of as it was.

With buying hats and shoes and getting lunch and dinner the day went on wings and nine o'clock came before Mary Jane had had time to think of being tired.

The big train pulled in just on time, its lights all a-blazing and the observation car looking most inviting. The porter had the berths made up ready and, in spite of the fact that Mary Jane had just declared she was not tired a bit and could sit up for two hours yet, that soft white pillow and turned down cover looked very nice. She decided that the observation car could wait till morning for inspection.

The last thing she said, before Mrs. Merrill pulled the heavy curtains together for the night was, "Mother, may I have anything I want for breakfast? If I may, I'm going to have two orders of hashed brown potatoes and not anything else!"

THE DAY IN BIRMINGHAM

"BEG pardon, Miss?" The colored waiter in the dining car bent lower, the better to hear Mary Jane's order.

"That's all I want," said Mary Jane in surprise; "just two orders of hashed brown potatoes and not anything else."

"Oh, Mary Jane," laughed Mrs. Merrill, "do have something else. And you must have a little fruit. Suppose you get an orange and then some cereal and then one order of potatoes—two would be too much."

"Yes, it would if I had to eat all that first," said Mary Jane sadly. "But I've been *counting* on those potatoes, Mother! You remember the good ones we had on the diner coming home from Grandmother's last

summer? And you know I ate more than one order *then*."

"So you did," agreed Mrs. Merrill, "and I promised you that you should have all you wanted next time we ate in a diner. Very well, suppose we compromise. You eat the orange and you may skip the cereal this time. But I think she had better have only one order of potatoes at the time," she added to the waiter, "for they will get cool."

While Mary Jane was eating her orange she looked out of the window at the changing scene. All through the night when she had been soundly sleeping, the train had carried her south through the prairies she was used to seeing, south through the wooded stretches and dull brown fields. And now, early the next morning, she found herself riding through the edges of coal lands. Long strings of loaded coal cars stood upon the railroad sidings; groups of workers stood about the tiny stations the train flew past

and the whole country seemed strange and different to the little girl.

But with all her watching out of the window, Mary Jane didn't miss noticing the twinkle in the eye of the waiter and she whispered to her sister, "Alice! I think that waiter man thinks it's funny to like potatoes and I think he's making me some nice ones, I do."

And so it proved, for when the orange was eaten, he set before Mary Jane the biggest platter of hashed brown potatoes she had ever seen. All brown and nice they were, with bits of parsley 'round the side and a pat of butter for her own particular use.

"Yumy-yum!" exclaimed Mary Jane as the platter was put before her, "I'm so glad I came!" And there was no watching scenery till every scrap of potato on the platter was eaten up.

"Want your other order now?" asked

Mrs. Merrill, when she saw that nothing but parsley was left on the platter.

"Well—" replied Mary Jane doubtfully, "do you suppose they'll have hashed brown potatoes for lunch? 'Cause if they will, I think I'll save my other order till then. I'm not just as hungry as I was."

"Good reason why," laughed Alice, "come on, let's not eat any more now. Let's go into the observation car."

The girls found riding in the observation car almost as much fun as eating in the diner. First they stood out on the "back porch" as Mary Jane called it and got good breaths of fresh air; then they came inside and settled themselves in big easy chairs and looked at all the "funny papers" they found in the car library—that took a long time because there were so many. Next they wrote letters, Mary Jane didn't really write to be sure, but she drew a very good picture of the

coal cars they passed on the way and of hills and valleys and put it in an envelope ready to send to Doris; and Alice wrote a nice long letter to her chum, Frances. And then, much to every one's surprise, the dining car man came through the train calling, "First call for luncheon! Dining car third car in front!" and it was time to wash up ready to eat again.

In the afternoon the country they were passing proved so interesting that Mary Jane and Alice didn't even try to look at books or magazines. For the mountains had grown higher and more interesting every mile of the way. Now they passed great holes in the ground out from which came little cars full of freshly mined coal, and Mr. Merrill explained to the girls all about how coal was dug out of the earth, loaded on those queer little cars and sent up to the sunshine ready to be loaded into railroad cars to take away for folks to use. And they

passed mining villages tucked down in the valleys. Some had great, rough barracks where all the miners lived. Some, and those were the most interesting to the girls, had groups of tiny little shacks where the miners lived with their families. They saw children playing, women working at their house work, and here and there a miner, his lamp on his head, going off to the mine for his work. Mary Jane and Alice had never realized till they saw those funny little lamps, fastened to the miner's cap, how queer it must seem to work hours down, down, down, deep in the darkness of the earth.

"I do believe," said Alice thoughtfully, "that I'll always notice more about coal now that I can guess better how hard it is to work down in the ground."

As long as the daylight lasted, the girls strained their eyes to see all that might be seen of the coal country. And just after the

sun set behind the iron mountains leaving the darkness of a winter evening behind, they noticed flashes of light off to the south-east.

"The steel furnaces of Birmingham," said Mr. Merrill, "and you shall see them close too, to-morrow. But now it's time to get our things on to meet Uncle Will."

They hustled back to their own car to find that the porter had carefully picked up their things and that everything was ready for them to slip into their wraps and get off the train. So there was still time to watch out into the darkness and see more of those brilliant flashes of light that made the sky glow so mysteriously.

Mrs. Merrill's uncle was at the station and hurried them into a big "boulevard bus" which would quickly take them home where aunt and cousins and a good dinner were waiting.

"There's just one thing I don't like about

this city," said Mary Jane later in the evening.

"So?" exclaimed Uncle Will, "why we think it's a pretty nice sort of a place."

"I 'spect it is," agreed Mary Jane politely, "but what I don't like is the dark—I can't see anything!"

"We'll soon fix that," said Mrs. Merrill, "I'll put my little girl to bed and then the time till daylight will vanish."

And sure enough it did. It wasn't any time at all till Mary Jane sat up in her sleeping porch couch and looked across the hills of the beautiful city.

"Oh!" she exclaimed delightedly, "I like having houses on hills, 'cause you can see so many of them!" Then she looked down at the street nearby and saw a little negro boy, not so very much bigger than herself, who was carrying on his head a great, big, heavy basket of washing.

"Boy! Boy! I don't know your name

but please wait a minute!" she called. "My sister wants to take a picture of a boy like you—she said she did!"

Fortunately Alice, who was in the house making the closer acquaintance of her cousins, was dressed so it didn't take but a minute to get her camera and take the picture Mary Jane so hastily arranged for her. The poor little boy didn't quite know what had happened to him, but he *did* understand the quarter Mr. Merrill handed him. He went on his way with such a broad smile on his face that Alice wished she had another picture just to get that smile in.

While the picture was being taken, Mary Jane washed and dressed. She came down the front stairs just in time to hear the plans for the day discussed.

"Yes, I wish we could stay more than one day," Mr. Merrill was saying, "but I have to be in Jacksonville to-morrow morning. So I think we'd better make up our minds to

visit all we can to-day and let the girls see as much as may be of your city. Then perhaps on our next trip we won't be so hurried."

"If that's the case," said Uncle Will as they responded to the breakfast bell, "I believe we'd better plan to get right off. We'll go way out to the steel plant first so as to be sure to get in there. Then if we get back in time, we can take our lunch at the Terrace Restaurant—I know the girls will like that—then we'll have the afternoon for an auto ride."

Mr. Merrill agreed that was a fine plan.

"Only I hope there isn't any doubt about that lunch," said Alice.

"Well-l," said Uncle Will teasingly, "do you eat three times a day at your house?"

"My no!" retorted Alice promptly, "not if I can help it! We eat *four* times!"

"Then you'd better have another helping of this fish," laughed Aunt Mabel, "because

with all that sight seeing to do, you're not going to have time to eat any four meals this day—I know that!"

In a few minutes they were off for the steel mills and Mary Jane and Alice found it one of the most interesting rides they had ever taken. Through narrow streets they went and then along boulevards; through tiny villages and a larger "model village" where industrial workers by the thousands made their homes. And finally great piles as high as houses of grayish looking stuff that looked like cinders but which Uncle Will said was "slag," told them that they were approaching the mills.

When they stepped off the car Alice exclaimed, "This looks exactly like a picture of a mining town that's in my geography!"

"Of course it is," laughed Uncle Will, "because this *is* a mining town. All the mining isn't done in the West you know. The iron ore and the coal for the furnaces

are mined right here on the spot—that's the reason these mills are just where they are, my dear."

They walked along the narrow street where men, women and mule carts mingled together in busy confusion, till they came to the company's office. There was some delay there because children were not usually allowed in the plant but on the firm assurance from Mr. Merrill and Uncle Will that each would take a girl under his especial care, permission was granted.

"But be sure you watch 'em, Mr. Cole," warned the guard as they started and Uncle Will promised.

Mary Jane wondered at all this fuss because she and Alice had been through factories at home and didn't think much of it. But half an hour later, when they were in the middle of the great plant, she stopped wondering and clung to her father's hand without being told. For the noise and con-

fusion and wonder of it all was beyond anything she had ever dreamed of. Engines tooting and screeching, whistles blowing orders, men shouting, great kettles of red hot iron sizzling and smoking, clanging hammers pounding on metal, the clatter of tumbling scrap iron and the clang and clank of the finished steel rails as they were loaded on waiting freight cars made it a wonderland of sights and sounds.

Mary Jane held tight to her father's hand and bravely went everywhere the big folks did. But she wasn't sorry when, an hour later, she found herself seated on a quiet terrace on the fifteenth floor of Birmingham's biggest office building, ordering her lunch.

After luncheon they walked all around the terrace and looked at the rows of mountains and the long stretch of valley dotted with huge smoke stacks of the various steel mills.

"And there," said Uncle Will, pointing

off into the distance, "is the place you were this morning."

"Well," said Mary Jane looking at it gravely, "I think I like it better over there than when it's right here—it isn't so noisy, far away."

Uncle Will laughed and suggested that if he and Mary Jane went down stairs ahead of the others, it was just possible, just possible of course, that they might have time to buy a box of candy before the auto came around. And that settled sightseeing from the terrace.

All through the long beautiful afternoon they drove, seeing the busy streets of the city, driving up the winding roadways lined with beautiful homes and leading toward the mountains, and spinning along the ridge roads that took them over the mountain crests.

It was almost dark when they stopped at Uncle Will's for their bags and they had to

drive fast to get to the station in time for their train.

"Well!" sighed Mary Jane, as she dropped down in the broad seat of the Pullman car a few minutes later, "I think that's a city where you do a *lot!*"

"And *I* think," replied Mrs. Merrill, reaching down to kiss her little girl, "that I know somebody not so very far from here, who's going to have dinner and go to bed just about as quick as a wink."

"And *I* think," added Mr. Merrill, "that I know somebody who'd better get to sleep as quick as they can, because to-morrow's the day we see flowers and—something else."

And just then, before Mary Jane had a chance to ask a question the porter came through the car calling, "Last call for dinner! Dinner in the dining car! First car in the front of de train!"

AT THE OSTRICH FARM

THE very first minute Mary Jane opened her eyes the next morning she peeked out of the window to see if the Southern flowers she had read about and seen pictures of, were in sight. She didn't see flowers but she did see palm trees—lots of them.

"Mother! Mother!" she called, peeking around into the next berth to speak to her mother, "you ought to get up quick! They're here, they are, those funny trees with the trimming on the top just like the pictures you showed us. Mother! May I get up and look at them from the back porch?"

Mrs. Merrill looked at her watch and told Mary Jane it was high time they were both getting up if they were to have time to dress

and eat breakfast before the train got into Jacksonville.

"Then I'll beat you dressed, I will," said Mary Jane gayly and she set to work at the job of dressing. First she took down her stockings that had hung all night over the little hammock by the window, and put those on; then the shoes that had been in the hammock went on next. After that she rolled up the covers clear to the bottom of the bed to get them out of the way, took down her clothes that had been hanging all night on a coat rack by the big curtains and put those on. She stopped just long enough to call, "Didn't I beat?" to her mother before she hurried off to the wash room. She thought it so much fun to brush her teeth in the funny little bowl made for that purpose that she wanted to have plenty of time to enjoy the job.

But Alice was there before her, as excited as Mary Jane could possibly be about the

palm trees and the few very fierce looking razor-back hogs she had seen grunting and snorting at the train, and so it was a rather sketchy scrubbing they gave themselves. Mrs. Merrill joined them in a minute to say that the diner was taken off in the night and that breakfast would be served in the observation car.

"Then I may go back there now, mayn't I, Mother?" asked Mary Jane, "and I know the way all by myself. I'll stay right on the back porch and not go near the gate till you come." The train was exactly the same as the one on which the Merrills had come down to Birmingham two days before and Mary Jane felt so at home after her whole day and two nights of travel she almost thought the train was her own.

"Yes, you may if Alice is ready and if you promise to stay right together," said Mrs. Merrill; "it will be fine to have some fresh air before breakfast."

The girls hurried back through the train so as not to lose a minute. The country looked entirely different from what they had seen before; the hills and mountains were all gone; many different sorts of trees made up the woods and even the grasses looked different from what the girls were used to seeing. And the roads! Such queer muddy things they were, with only an occasional brick paved road fit for automobile travel.

All too soon Mr. Merrill came out and announced, "You can't have a regular breakfast this morning, girls, just fruit and a bite of something the steward says, so you'd better come and get what there is right away."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Mary Jane in great distress, "won't they have hashed brown potatoes?"

"Haven't you had enough of those yet?" laughed Mr. Merrill. But Mary Jane's

fright proved to be a false alarm; there was plenty of breakfast for folks who were used to simple food—hashed brown potatoes for Mary Jane, eggs for Alice and her father and toast for Mrs. Merrill.

The train was running about forty minutes late the conductor reported so there was time to go back onto the back platform a while before Jacksonville was reached.

When Mary Jane got off the train at Jacksonville she had expected to step right out to flower beds and summer beauties. Instead of that, such a sight as met her eyes she never would have dreamed of! Smoke, and dirt, and dripping water, and slush under foot, and the horrid smell of burned wood and leather. And such confusion that Mary Jane felt sure they must have fallen into a cyclone or something.

"What's the trouble?" called Mr. Merrill to an usher who was trying to get through

the crowd to carry their bags, "what's happened? Never saw so much going on in this station before in all *my* life."

"Fire, sir!" replied the usher, "pretty bad fire, sir. The station, she took a-fire last night and dey jes got her out 'bout an hour ago. Got any luggage here, sir?"

"Not a bit, it's on this train we came on," answered Mr. Merrill.

"You's lucky, sir, you is," laughed the darky and he piloted them out into the street.

They walked about a half a block away from the confusion of the station and then Mrs. Merrill said, "Now look, girls!" And the girls looked away from the burned roof of the pretty station and out toward the city. And there they saw the summerland they had hoped for!—palm trees and flowers growing in the parkways, summer dresses on the passersby and a warmth and glow in the air.

"Oh, Mother!" exclaimed Alice happily,

"it's true, isn't it? Summer *is* here—and please may we take off our coats?"

"Not so fast," replied Mrs. Merrill, "you'll find them none too warm when you're riding." And sure enough, when they got into the taxi Mr. Merrill signaled and started swiftly up the street, they weren't a bit too warm.

All too soon their hotel was reached, the girls would have liked to ride all day.

"Never you mind," said Mr. Merrill consolingly, "you shall ride again in about a half an hour. But come in first and leave your bags, and me."

"Leave you, Dadah?" asked Mary Jane, "you're not going away from here, are you?"

"I'm not, but you will be," said Mr. Merrill. "I mean that my business begins here this morning and that you and mother will have to get around by yourselves while I work. But mother knows the way about just as well as I do and she'll see that you

poke into every corner you want to see."

When the girls went around to the front of the hotel and saw the beautiful park of palms and flowers that filled a whole block, they were not anxious to leave it.

"Let's not ride," suggested Mary Jane, "let's stay and play under those trees."

"I don't know about that," replied Mrs. Merrill, "you see, I know what there is to see on our ride and *you* don't. Better ride while you can and play in the park this noon."

So a few minutes later Mr. Merrill put them all three into a big car and started off toward the business part of the city for his work.

The girls had never ridden in a sight seeing car before and they begged a place right by the driver so they would be sure to see and hear everything. Mrs. Merrill sat just behind them where they could speak to her and also could have the comfortable feeling

that she was very near. First they drove down the river and saw glimpses of the broad St. Johns River and enjoyed the pretty trees and gardens and homes that nestled along its low banks. Then they turned back through the city and out on the other side.

"Where we going now?" asked Mary Jane when she noticed that the houses were getting smaller and fewer and further apart.

"Out to the Farm," replied the driver.

"A regular farm where they grow chickens and things like my Grandmother does?" asked the little girl.

"It's a regular farm all right, Miss," said the driver, "but they don't grow anything your Grandmother does. They grow alligators and ostriches."

"My gracious!" exclaimed Mary Jane, her eyes open wide with amazement, "do they plant 'em?"

The driver laughed and answered, "You just wait and see—we're most there now.

See that white fence and those buildings? There we are!"

With a flourish he stopped by the big white gate and Mrs. Merrill and the girls got out of the car. "You'll wait for us?" she asked the driver.

"Long as you like," he replied, so without a bit of worry about time they went into the "Farm."

At first Mary Jane was disappointed for there seemed to be nothing in the whole place but fences! But when they walked closer they easily found the Alligator Farm and there the girls were so interested that they forgot all about such creatures as ostriches. They saw big alligators and little alligators and tiny, tiny little alligators that would have easily been hidden in Mary Jane's small hand. They saw the great big fellow, more than a hundred years old, get his food and such gleaming teeth as he had made Mary Jane glad he was inside an iron

fence—*there* she liked to watch him, but she didn't think he was *quite* the creature one would like to meet walking along a road. They saw alligators flop their tails to music —or at least the keepers *said* they flopped to music so it must be so!—and most wonderful of all, they saw alligators "shoot the shoots" into a small lake. There was no pretend about that; the 'gaters climbed slowly and careful up the steps of the shoot, crawled over the top and then with a loud "thud" dropped their clumsy bodies onto the shoot and slid down into the water.

Mary Jane and Alice would have been glad to stay there all morning watching these strange creatures and Mrs. Merrill had to remind them twice about the ostriches and about lunch and more riding before they could tear themselves away.

They wandered over to the ostrich section of the "Farm" and found the queer looking birds poking their noses outside the wire

fence begging as plain as could be for food.

"You and Mary Jane feed them, Mother," suggested Alice, "and I'll take your picture."

Mrs. Merrill bought some food and she and Mary Jane stood close to the fence and handed it in. The birds reached their long necks out and *nearly* helped themselves out of the bags, so tame were they. One big bird seemed to take a fancy to Mary Jane and he was determined to get his food from her. Just as Alice was ready to take the picture he reached out and made a grab.

"Owh!" screamed the little girl, "he got it! Make him give it back quick, Mother!"

"What did he get?" said Mrs. Merrill coming close.

"My pocket book!" screamed Mary Jane who was fairly dancing she was so excited, "he just reached his bill out and grabbed it out of my hand, he did." And sure enough, the great bird was making off to his nest just

as fast as he could go (which was pretty fast) and from his bill hung Mary Jane's pretty new pocket book in which she had two best kerchiefs and twenty-five cents of spending money.

The keeper heard Mary Jane's screams (and so did lots of other folks by the way) and he came running to see what had happened.

"Is that all!" he exclaimed, when Mrs. Merrill pointed out what the ostrich had done, "we'll have that bag in no time—I was afraid he'd hurt the little girl though I did think he was too tame for doing harm."

He unlocked the gate and hurried over to where the big bird stood. As soon as the ostrich saw his keeper coming he dropped the bag and raced off with his long funny stride just as though he knew he had done wrong and wanted to get away. Mary Jane couldn't help but laugh at him he looked so afraid and so very comical. She got her

pocket book back undamaged and as the man handed it to her he said, "Too bad, Missy, too bad. But you come again and I'll make him behave. Wouldn't you like a little 'gator for a present, 'count of your scare?"

"Oh," replied Mary Jane, her eyes shining with delight, "I don't need one myself 'cause I'm here to see 'em. But I want one for my little chum—she's home."

"All right, Missy," said the man, "I'd like to send her one if your mother will allow me to." And he pulled out his book and took down the address.

So that's how it happened that a week later the expressman delivered a box containing two live alligators to the amazed Dana family.

"THE BOAT'S A-FIRE!"

FORTUNATELY they got back to the hotel a while before lunch time and could take a walk through the beautiful little park. Alice in particular was anxious to see every sort of flower and plant and to learn its name. But dear me! with all the lovely flowers there it would have taken a day to study them every one and she had to be content with seeing only a small part of the grounds.

"Never mind," said Mrs. Merrill, as they sat down to lunch, "the same flowers will be all through Florida and you'll have plenty of time to see them all you wish."

"Oh!" exclaimed a lady who sat at the same table with them, "your little daughter doesn't think *these* flowers are the sights she

is to see, does she? Just wait till you get further south, this early in the season every ten miles makes a difference and you'll find lovelier gardens the further you go."

Alice and Mary Jane opened their eyes in amazement; lovelier flowers than these! Weren't they lucky to be seeing so much? Mrs. Merrill continued the conversation with the table mates and asked where she could find about trains going to the beach.

"I really don't know," replied the lady, who proved to be Mrs. Wilkins of New York State, a friend of Mrs. Merrill's cousin, "because we hadn't thought of going there. We can see the beach when we are further south so we're going to take a boat ride on the St. Johns River. That's something you can't do at the beach resorts."

"That sounds good," agreed Mrs. Merrill, "what do you girls think?"

Alice and Mary Jane were delighted with the idea of a boat ride and Mrs. Wilkins

urged them to decide to go on "their" boat. They had decided to go on a comfortable, safe looking steamer of fair size that went up the river to Mandarin, the home of Harriet Beecher Stowe. There, so they had been promised, they might see the very nook in the trees where she did so much of the writing that made her famous.

So the lunch visit was cut short and the little party drove at once to the dock and settled themselves on the upper front deck of the river boat. Mary Jane wasn't in any particular hurry for the boat to start because from her safe deck she could look down on the wharves and see the bustle and hurry of shipping fruit and enjoy the fun of watching the dozens of gay, lazy, little negro boys who were supposed to be helping the work. They sang so well and helped themselves to fruit so generously and teased each other so comically that Mary Jane thought it was as good as watching a play to see them.

When the boat finally started away from the dock, Mr. Wilkins took the two girls down to the engine room and explained the workings of the boat to them. Mary Jane thought it very wonderful that the queer looking engine that went "Phis-s-s-sh, *ping;* Phis-s-s-sh, *ping!*" was the thing that sent so big a boat a-going through the water.

They must have stayed down stairs longer than they realized for when they came on deck again, the city of Jacksonville was way, way off and the boat was beginning to sidle up to the left bank of the river. Before long they were landed at a ricketty old dock that stuck its nose out into the river to greet them.

"Back in an hour!" the Captain called as the boat backed away, "plenty of time to see the homestead. It's only five minutes walk down the river bank."

The little party of tourists were quickly

surrounded by a crowd of children who ran out onto the dock to greet them and beg them to buy bananas, grapefruit, oranges and flowers.

"Not till we come back," said Mrs. Merrill firmly, "but if any of you can show us Mrs. Stowe's home we may buy something before we leave."

Fortunately it wasn't far to go. The beautiful trees along the river bank, dripping with streamers of Spanish moss, made such nice play corners that Mary Jane was much more interested in playing house than in seeing famous sights!

"Please let me stay here and play while you look at houses, Mother," said the little girl. "I'll stay right here, 'deed I will, and I can't get lost because in front there's only the river and in back there's only the road and the house and you."

"And let me stay too," said Alice; "I could

make the nicest play house here—see, Mother, those twisted branches and the view across the river?"

So the grown folks went on with the sight-seeing and the two girls and about eight of the neighbor children stayed by the river bank.

"Now," said Alice, who was quite at home making playhouses even though they were located in Florida, "this is the living room and here's the dining room and here, where you can see the river best, is the porch."

"Where's your walls?" asked one of the neighbor children who evidently wasn't used to making up houses as the Merrill girls were, "looks like all one room to me!"

"But it isn't," explained Alice, "you have to pretend the walls."

"You can't pretend walls," laughed the boy, "wall's is real! Can't you make 'em?"

"Yes, we could if we had burrs," said Alice thoughtfully looking around. "Have

"This is the living room and here's the dining room and here, where you can see the river bed, is the porch"

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you got anything here that will stick together easily?"

Three children darted off shouting "Yes! We'll get it!" all in one breath and in a few minutes they were back with great prickly branches.

"Goody! Goody! Goody!" shouted Mary Jane happily, "now we'll have time to make the whole house before mother gets back, 'cause those are so nice and big." She reached out for a branch so as to begin building her share.

But dear me, she didn't know much about Florida "prickers" or she wouldn't have been in such a hurry! The branches had tiny, queer little prickers far different from any she had ever touched or seen and in a second her fingers were full of itching barbs.

"Wait, wait, *wait!*" called one of the bigger girls, "don't rub it! Don't touch it! I'll get them out for you." She must have had them in her own fingers before, because

she seemed to know exactly how to get the troublesome things out. And then, when Mary Jane's hand felt all right again, the big girl, who said her name was Maggie, showed them just how to handle the pricky cactus branches without getting the sharp spines into fingers.

Then Alice showed them a plan of making the walls and the children set to work. It was fun making a tree house in the crooked, gnarled, moss-covered old tree and it was fun playing with new children who so quickly learned to play just as the Merrill children did.

"What's yer doing?" asked one girl as she saw Mary Jane apparently pinch herself.

"I'm just a-pinching myself," laughed Mary Jane; "couldn't you see? I'm a-pinching myself to see if I'm me! I feel like I was somebody else I'm dreaming about 'way down here playing."

"Well, you're you, don't you worry," said Alice gayly, "and you better hurry if you want to finish sticking flowers in this wall because I can hear the folks coming back as sure as can be."

"How pretty!" exclaimed Mrs. Merrill, as she came close enough to see the playhouse the children had made.

"And this is the very tree I was telling you about," said the guide who came with them; "this very branched tree is where Mrs. Stowe sat when doing much of her writing."

"Isn't it interesting," said Mrs. Merrill to the girls, "to think you have made a playhouse in the very tree where Mrs. Stowe wrote parts of 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'?"

"Yes, I '*spect* it's interesting," said Mary Jane, "but I *know* it's fun. And please, Mother, do we have to go yet? Can't we build some more?"

"I'm afraid not, girlies," said Mrs. Mer-

rill regretfully, "because our hour is up and our boat should be coming around the bend of the river this very minute."

But though they all went back at once to the dock, they had a long, long wait till the boat came. The sun began going down in the west and the girls got so very hungry they were only too glad to buy generous helpings of fruit from their new playmates. And finally when a boat did come to the dock it wasn't the nice boat they had come down on at all! It was a small boat, oh, a very small boat, already so full of passengers that when the new folks got on at the Mandarin dock it was loaded almost to the water line.

"Never mind," said Mr. Wilkins comfortingly; "it surely must be safe and anyway it's only a short trip. Perhaps we can get seats at the back." And there they settled themselves and waved good-by to their new friends as the boat steamed down stream toward the distant city.

For a while the girls were content to sit and eat their oranges and chat of the fun they had just had. But in the course of an hour, Mary Jane began to fidget and to ask for something to do.

"Nothing much to do on this boat but to sit still, Mary Jane," said Mrs. Merrill. "It isn't big enough for a little girl to walk around and see things—you'd be in folks' way. Suppose you just sit still and look all around and see how much you can see. Maybe you'll find something interesting to talk about that way."

So Mary Jane sat still (all but wiggling her feet and she thought that didn't count), and looked around the boat. She saw folks all around her who had been sight-seeing and who had armfuls of flowers and fruit they had brought from up the river. But in the front of the boat she saw six or eight men in earnest talk at the prow—something seemed to be exciting them very much. And then,

queerest of all, up on the tiny half deck of the boat she saw a man and a woman taking turns at a strange looking pump sort of a thing that seemed not to work very smoothly as they tried to make it go back and forth. For a minute she watched them; then she turned to her mother and asked, "What is that thing, Mother? And what are they doing with it? What's the matter?"

Mrs. Merrill and Mr. and Mrs. Wilkins looked to where Mary Jane pointed and Mr. Wilkins got up quickly and stepped up onto the little half deck.

But before he had had time to ask a question, the woman who was trying to work the pump, turned and replied to Mary Jane's questions.

"The boat's a-fire!" she called, "that's the matter! The boat's a-fire and the pump's broke!".

Mr. Wilkins spoke up in a loud, firm voice, "But I think we can fix it at once if

every one will sit still. Will the Captain please put to shore at once?"

But that was just what the Captain would not do. His crew had been trying for some minutes to get him to turn in toward the nearest shore, but he obstinately refused to do so.

"The pump's broke," he admitted, "but the fire ain't much and we'll get to dock all right—now jes' don't get excited, folks!"

As he spoke, little puffs of smoke rose from the engine room and the big pile of dry wood which had carelessly been piled too close to the firebox showed signs of bursting out into great flames.

The passengers, remembering the crowded boat, tried to sit still and be quiet and calm. But when they saw the twinkling lights of the city, still so very far away; felt the fading light and the dampness of the evening chill, and saw how far even the nearest shore of the wide river seemed to be, they couldn't

help noticing that there wasn't a life belt or boat to be had. Almost everybody began to feel panicky.

And at that very minute Mary Jane began to cry. Not a loud panicky cry, but a low, sobbing cry that sounded very heart-broken.

"Don't be afraid, little girl," said the man next to her; "we'll get you home safe some way!"

"I'm not afraid," Mary Jane managed to say between sobs, " 'cause I can float. But if I have to get into the river and float, who's going to take care of this big banana I'm taking to my Dadah? He likes bananas!"

For a second every one on the boat stared. And then a general laugh relieved the tension, and folks were willing to sit down and trust to getting a-shore. The pump was kept working as hard as its broken condition would let it; men dipped into the river with the only two buckets aboard and tossed

water onto the fire and slowly the lights of the city twinkled nearer—and nearer—and nearer.

Other boats came comfortingly near and were passed; docks loomed out of the twilight, and finally with a bump the little, overcrowded boat slipped into its place by the shore.

There wasn't a panic even then, but folks, some way, got off that boat in a hurry. The firm land never had felt so good!

"Where's the little girl who wanted to save her banana?" called the Captain as he turned his boat over to the dock firemen. "I want to thank her."

But the Merrills were already out of hearing hurrying to their belated dinner, their Dadah and jolly plan-making for the morrow.

A BIT OF SUNNY SPAIN

"EARLY to bed, early to rise, and you can catch the first train in the morning," said Mr. Merrill as they came in from a little stroll through the gayly lighted park that same evening. "And I really think that you folks better forget about me for a few days and go on with your sightseeing by yourselves. The first train for St. Augustine leaves at nine in the morning and you can have lots more fun there than here where everything is more citified."

"But, Dadah," said Mary Jane, "will there be flowers there and warm weather and everything just the same?"

"Not a thing the same," replied Mr. Merrill teasingly; "there'll be more flowers and more warm weather and more palm trees and

more fun for girls and lots more chance to play."

"Then let's go and you come as soon as you get through your business, Dadah," said Mary Jane.

So after an early breakfast and a brisk walk through the interesting markets, Mrs. Merrill, Alice and Mary Jane got aboard the fine "Special" train that went down the east coast.

The very first stop, some two hours later, was their station, and the minute Mary Jane got off she felt a pang of disappointment. All there was to see was a row of funny busses, a narrow parkway of flowers and palms and then fields—just plains, fields or vacant lots and not an interesting thing anywhere. But a ride of a mile in one of the busses made a change. They came to the little town of St. Augustine ("It doesn't grow near the railroad, this town doesn't," Mary Jane afterwards explained to her

father, "because railroads are so very now-a-days!") and that was quaint and pretty enough to delight any little girl.

After they had taken their bags to their big, sunny room, changed their traveling clothes for cool, summer dresses, low shoes and parasols, they went down to inspect their new home. It seemed like moving into fairyland—living in that hotel did—and Mary Jane had to pinch herself three or four times to make sure that she, really truly *she* was to live in that beautiful place for several days. There were gardens, oh, beautiful gardens full of gay flowers, and brooks and bridges right in the garden—inside the house! And on the bridge in the center of the garden, stood a little girl just about Mary Jane's age—a little girl who looked all the world as though she would like a playmate.

"May I go and talk to her now?" asked Mary Jane.

"Perhaps we'd better have lunch first," suggested Mrs. Merrill, glancing at her watch. "Who'd have guessed it was nearly one o'clock!"

"I could have guessed that as easy as pie," said Alice, "because I'm starved."

"You won't be long," said Mrs. Merrill, laughingly, "because you'll find lots to eat here." And they went toward the dining room.

"Now where would you like to sit?" asked the pompous head waiter as he escorted Mary Jane, who happened to be leading her family, to a seat.

"If you'd just as soon," replied Mary Jane politely, "I'd like to sit at the table where there's the most to eat. And Alice would like to sit there too, 'cause she's always just as hungry as I am. And mother'll have to sit there if we do 'cause she belongs to us."

"Then this is the very place for you," said the head waiter, as with twinkling eyes he

pulled out three chairs at a cosy window table. "These little girls," he added to their waiter, "are to have all they can eat whether it's early or late."

"I think we're going to like this place, Mother," said Mary Jane happily, as she unfolded her napkin, while the waiter went to get their menu cards, " 'cause they seem to like *us*."

They had a royal luncheon, ending with two kinds of ice cream and a promise from the waiter of another still different sort for evening dinner.

After luncheon they took a little walk through the "square," enjoying the gay shops and the curious houses and trees.

"Isn't this the place where the 'Fountain of Youth' is?" said Alice as she looked up from a window full of pictures. "That looks like the picture of it in my geography."

"Oh, I know all about the Fountain of Youth!" exclaimed Mary Jane happily.

"Miss Lynn told us about it in kindergarten. Is *this* it?"

"Not right here," replied Mrs. Merrill, "but only a mile or two outside the city. Suppose we hail one of those pretty little surreys and ride out there. I know you girls will like that and I love riding in those little fringed surreys—they make me feel so gay."

A few steps farther on they came across an empty surrey, driven by a man who was plainly of Spanish descent and who seemed very glad to have passengers who would like to hear his stories of the founding of the little town.

Before they drove out to the "Fountain of Youth," he took them through a few of the little streets of the town and told them stories about the houses and stores they passed. Then they turned northward and drove past the city gates, the forts and the old cemetery toward the spring the girls were so anxious to see.

"But, Mother!" exclaimed Alice, as they drew up in front of a rather dilapidated, low building, "*this* isn't it! I know what it looks like from the picture and it's nothing like this."

"This is the 'Fountain of Youth' all the same," answered Mrs. Merrill. "Those pictures that are used so much were taken years ago when there was an open pavalion over the spring. In recent years it has been housed in as you see it now. You won't be disappointed with the inside though—it's as curious and interesting as ever. Come in and get a drink."

Mary Jane and Alice followed her down three narrow steps, through a low doorway and into a dim room. At first they couldn't see anything interesting but as they looked about longer they changed their minds. Bubbling out of the ground, almost at their feet, was a little spring—the very same spring that the Spaniard, Ponce de Leon,

had discovered over three hundred years ago.

"But, Mother," objected Mary Jane, "couldn't he see that this was just a common, every-day spring and that it was just so ordinary this way?"

"Oh, it didn't look ordinary to him, you may be sure," said Mrs. Merrill. "You must remember that he had landed after a long, long sea voyage and fresh water, bubbling from the ground, looked more than usually good. Then all this place where we are standing was a forest of bloom—thousands of flowers he had never before seen were here and it must have looked very lovely and magical to him."

"Yes, that would make a difference," admitted Alice.

"Then, too," continued Mrs. Merrill, "even before he came here, the Indians had a legend that this was a magic well and he who drank thereof would never die. That, I think, is because it is a mineral spring and

the water tastes different from most spring water. Try it yourselves and see." And then as the girls filled their cups she added, "So you can hardly blame the stranger if he thought he had found the spring of youth he had set out to locate, can you?"

The girls made faces over the water—they didn't like the taste a bit. "I know why he called it the 'Fountain of Youth,' " laughed Alice as she tried to finish her cupful. "He had to call it something interesting or folks would never drink it!"

"What are those stone paths?" asked Mary Jane as she set her cup down.

"Those aren't paths, little girls," said the guide who had stood near by. "Those stones make a cross—but such a big cross you hardly notice it at first. See! There are fifteen stones for one part and thirteen for the other. We are told that Ponce de Leon himself laid those here to mark the year he

discovered the spring; that was in fifteen-thirteen."

As they went out from the dimness of the spring house into the warm sunshine, who should they see coming toward them but the little girl Mary Jane had seen that morning on the bridge in the hotel gardens. Mary Jane hung back a minute to speak to her.

"I'm Mary Jane and you live in my house," she said by way of introduction.

"No," replied the little girl half shyly; "you live in mine because I lived here first. I'm Ellen. Are you tired?"

"No-o!" answered Mary Jane positively; "what is there to be tired about?"

"It's such a long way out here," said Ellen.

Ellen's mother came up just then and seeing her little girl speaking to the newcomers she added, "We tried to walk out here and I should have known better because it's much

too far for Ellen. But she'll have to be a brave girl because there's no other way to get back."

"There is if you don't mind being crowded a bit," suggested Mrs. Merrill hospitably. "We three can sit on the back seat and you and Ellen can sit in front with the driver. We're just ready to start back now."

On the way back the two ladies chatted and found they had many mutual friends, and the little girls planned to play together as soon as they got home. At the suggestion of Ellen's mother, Mrs. Berry, they stopped at an orange orchard and saw the funny little stoves that are set among the trees to keep the orchard warmer in a cold spell. Mary Jane thought those little stoves the queerest things she'd seen yet.

"You tell me when I leave the door open at home, Mother," she said, "that I must be trying to warm the whole out of doors and here they really do it!"

"So they do," agreed Mrs. Merrill; "only you see we haven't an orchard to use the heat up our way!"

The owner of the orchard gave each girl an orange and was so nice to them, showing them around and letting the girls pick fruit and take pictures, that they could hardly bear to leave.

"I think," said Mary Jane as they climbed into the little surrey, "that when I'm big I'll have me an orange orchard and let little girls come to see me and give 'em fruit— I think that's an awfully nice business, I do."

It was almost dinner time when they got back to the hotel; no time for play then. But after dinner Mary Jane took down her Marie Georgannamore and Ellen brought her best doll, Fifi, and the two little girls sat out on the terrace in great big comfy chairs and played together till after eight o'clock. Then Mrs. Merrill came out to take Mary Jane upstairs.

"You'll have to go to sleep as quickly as ever you can," she said, "because I know an awfully jolly surprise that's coming to-morrow. Coming if a certain little girl I'm acquainted with gets to sleep."

"Is it something to play?" guessed Mary Jane.

"No guesses—not even one," answered Mrs. Merrill, "and I'll tell you only this much. It's very jolly; and you've often wanted to do it; and you've never done it before in all your life."

"The owner of the orchard let the girls pick fruit and take pictures" *Page 80*

"WHOA! PLEASE WHOA!"

"NOW do we do it?" asked Mary Jane's eager little voice; "this is to-day!"

"Sure enough it is," said Mrs. Merrill, sleepily. She looked over to Mary Jane's bed and saw that a certain young person was wide awake and was sitting up straight and tall in her bed which stood right in the path of the sunshine.

"Yes it is, Mother," added Mary Jane, fearful that her mother wasn't really waked up yet; "see the sun? And you know this is the day when the surprise comes. Do we have it now?"

"Dear me, no," said Mrs. Merrill, "how could we? See, Alice is sound asleep and

none of us are dressed and the surprise is for three folks—three folks who are in this room."

"Don't worry about Alice," said Mary Jane gayly; "I'll get her up!" And with that threat she jumped out of bed and pulled the light covers off her sister. "Come on, Alice," she cried; "you can sleep at home! Let's get up and do the surprise."

"Will I like it, Mother?" asked Alice and, luckily, she was too interested in the surprise to mind that the covers had been pulled off.

"Will you?" exclaimed Mrs. Merrill. "You just wait and see! You've been wanting to do this very thing for years and years and years."

"Then let's get dressed quick," said Alice; "who's going to tub first, Mary Jane?"

"Not too fast there, my dears," said Mrs. Merrill; "the surprise doesn't come till eleven o'clock."

"MOTHER!" exclaimed both girls as

though in one breath. And Mary Jane added, "Do we have to wait *all that time?*"

"Well," said Mrs. Merrill practically, as she glanced at her watch, "I wouldn't call that such a hopelessly long time if I were you. It's after seven now and nobody's even started to dress. Of course you don't want any breakfast," she added teasingly, "but—"

"Of course we *do*, you mean, Mother," laughed Alice; "I hope the surprise won't interfere with eating—I wouldn't like that."

"Well then," continued Mrs. Merrill, "if we have to dress and eat and maybe take a little walk to look at the shops and maybe do something else I know we *could* do—and it's nice, too—I think it's a pretty good thing the surprise doesn't come till eleven."

When the girls sat down to the breakfast table a half an hour later they were glad they had plenty of leisure to enjoy their meal for such fruit, such fish and such delicious

Southern biscuit they never had eaten before.

"I just wish there was two of me, one named Mary and one named Jane," said Mary Jane, as she eyed the plate of biscuits and the honey regretfully, "'cause then one of me could eat some more. But seeing I'm just one all together, I can't!"

"I think it's time for a walk anyway," said Mrs. Merrill. "You know we didn't have a chance to look at all those nice little shops yesterday and that's sure to be fun."

And it was. The girls and their mother too, enjoyed poking about in the little sidewalk shops that lined the main street and they saw many pretty things they thought of taking home to Grandmother Hodges or some friend.

"Mother!" exclaimed Alice suddenly, "see that clock? It's only quarter before ten and the surprise doesn't come till eleven. *How* are we going to wait all that time?"

"We're not," said Mrs. Merrill, as she made a sudden plan; "we're going swimming."

"Swimming!" exclaimed Mary Jane; "where's the lake?"

"Wait and see," replied Mrs. Merrill and she led the way back to their hotel. Mary Jane supposed they must be going back for bathing suits but not so. They didn't go to their room; they went down a long hallway and up some stairs and along another hall. And by that time, Mary Jane heard noises that sounded exactly like the sounds folks make when they are in swimming and having a jolly time.

"Why, Mother!" she said in amazement, "do they keep the swim in the house down here?"

"Sounds like it, doesn't it?" answered Mrs. Merrill and she stopped at a window long enough to buy three tickets, one pink and two blue. "Sounds exactly like it—

let's look." And she led them through a doorway.

Such a sight as the girls saw then, they never had imagined! In a great room, surrounded with balconies on which folks walked and danced and played, was a large tank of beautifully clear water. And in this tank some fifty or more folks were swimming and playing. At one end the children played and swam and at the other end the big folks who evidently could swim better or walk in deeper water were enjoying themselves.

Mary Jane took a long breath as she looked in amazement about her, then she said, "Come on, Mother! Let's do it too!"

"Oh, may we?" exclaimed Alice rapturously; "will they let us?"

"That's what our tickets are for," explained Mrs. Merrill. "And we dress right down in these nice dressing rooms at this end."

Five minutes later the two girls, with their mother close behind, were gingerly stepping into the water as it lapped on the marble steps at the end of the pool. Mary Jane anxiously watched the first touch of the water, then a happy expression came over her face and she exclaimed, "It isn't cold and it isn't hot, Mother. It's just like I am."

Of course Mary Jane didn't know how to swim but both Alice and Mrs. Merrill could swim a little and they took turns holding Mary Jane's chin and showing her how it was done. Mary Jane had no trouble getting her feet up—she got them up so far out of the water that her swimming was more splashing than swimming but it was fun for them all just the same. Nobody thought a bit about time till suddenly Alice looked at the great clock that was at one end of the pool.

"Mother!" she cried, "it's quarter to eleven!"

"Goodness!" exclaimed Mrs. Merrill; "we'll have to fly for they'll be out in front promptly at eleven."

"Who'll be?" asked Mary Jane.

"Wait and see," teased Mrs. Merrill as she drippingly made her way up the steps and toward the dressing rooms.

Nobody took long to primp that time and at five minutes to eleven they were leaving the Casino.

"That's plenty of time," said Alice comfortably.

"Well, none too much," said Mrs. Merrill doubtfully, "because I have to go up to the room and change my skirt."

"Why, Mother," said Alice, "that's a nice one you have on."

"Just so," laughed Mrs. Merrill, "too nice. Let's see, have you both your gingham bloomers on this morning—I forgot to notice. Yes, you have. Then you don't need to change. You may wait for me

here." And she hurried off toward the elevator.

Soon she was back, wearing an old denim skirt that the girls didn't remember ever seeing. They thought it an awfully queer looking thing but had no time to ask questions because she hurried them right out through the garden.

Through the garden, past the hedges and there—right by the leafy gate—all saddled and bridled and ready to go, stood three of the prettiest little ponies the girls had ever seen!

"Oh! I know! I know! I know!" shouted Alice; "we're going to take a pony ride."

"Goody! Goody! Goody! I'm glad I'm me!" cried Mary Jane and she danced up and down and clapped her hands so hard that the man who was holding the ponies laughed and laughed.

"So you really think it will be fun?" asked

Mrs. Merrill, happily, as both girls, with never a thought that they were on the street, nearly smothered her with a great bear hug; "well, I think so too. So let's be off. See, the ponies are pawing to go."

First they decided which pony Mary Jane should ride. The groom put her on one, but he seemed most too big so she was changed to another. Then Alice was lifted up onto hers.

"Don't bother about me," said Mrs. Merrill, "I can manage very well with this stone. Please start off with the girls." So the groom trotted after the girls whose ponies were walking briskly toward the market place.

When Mrs. Merrill caught up with them, she suggested that they turn south, down the quiet, narrow street at the right, as the main street seemed too crowded for even safe ponies when they were ridden by folks who had never been pony-back before. So they

rode a few blocks past quaint old Spanish houses and gardens—which the girls didn't even glance at!—then east past the old barracks and south to the open country. By the time they had ridden a couple of miles the girls were getting "on to" the knack of sitting straight and of holding their reins and guiding their steeds, so the groom suggested that they go west, around the village and ride around the old fort at the north.

"Can you canter, Miss?" he asked Alice, who was riding very well for a novice.

The pony must have caught the word for he hurried off and Alice answered over her shoulder, "I-I-I did-d-n't-t know-ow it b-b-but I-I-I c-c-can!"

Mary Jane's pony, seeing his mate start off so gayly, thought he must be left behind so he started cantering too—much to Mary Jane's dismay.

"Whoa! Please whoa!" shouted Mary Jane with more politeness than success.

The pony paid no attention to her! He cantered along rapidly a half a block and then, spying a bit of choice green in a vacant lot, turned suddenly in and began to eat.

"Hold on, dear!" called Mrs. Merrill reassuringly, as she hurried up behind her little girl; "hold on and you'll be all right."

"I'm a-holdin'," replied Mary Jane breathlessly; "when I go riding I don't let him leave me, 'deed I don't!" and she clutched at the lines with all her might. But evidently the pony had had no thought of running away. He liked his eating so much that it took a hard pull on the lines by the groom to make him raise his head and start on again.

For a little while the groom rode close by Mary Jane and held on to the lines and Mrs. Merrill rode ahead with Alice. But the pony behaved so very well that soon Mary Jane held her own reins again and proudly

rode all around the fort and back to the hotel.

"Oh, that was fun!" exclaimed Alice with a sigh of pure joy and satisfaction as she was lifted off her pony.

"I think I'd like to ride every day," said Mary Jane; "I like a pony that runs and eats and takes me riding. Do they have ponies other places?" And then, as Mrs. Merrill paid the groom and led the girls back to the hotel, Mary Jane added, "Now what do we do next?"

LUNCHEON BY THE OLD WELL

BUT by the time she had had her luncheon, Mary Jane began to realize that a long swim, or trying at swimming, and a pony ride of an hour was almost enough for a little girl to do in one day. And when, as they came from the dining room, she saw Ellen running toward her with her French doll in her arms, Mary Jane was willing to promise to "play dolls" in the courtyard garden all afternoon. Alice wanted to take a few pictures in the gardens and write letters and send postals to her friends at home, and Mrs. Merrill had letters and a bit of mending, so the afternoon spent in the sunshine of the inner garden passed very quickly.

Next morning, as they were coming out

from the dining room after breakfast, Mrs. Merrill stopped a few minutes to talk with the steward and the girls knew immediately that something nice was coming.

"What do you think," she asked as she joined them a minute later, "of having a picnic luncheon to-day? Remember that pretty street we rode south on yesterday? All those old Spanish houses were built years and years ago. The queer one, that has no garden in front, is supposed to be the oldest house in America. When I was here before the kind lady who takes care of the place sometimes let folks eat their luncheon in the garden by the old well. Wouldn't that be fun?"

Of course it would be jolly and both Alice and Mary Jane were eager to be off.

"Let's go down that same street we rode on, Mother," suggested Alice, "because when we were riding we didn't see a thing but the ponies and the road and I'd like to

see everything—every single thing, in this nice old town."

"Very well," agreed Mrs. Merrill, "that's what we'll do. Our luncheon will be ready in a very little while. Let's get our mail and tell Ellen that Mary Jane can't play this morning and I expect by that time it will be waiting for us."

Sure enough! By the time all necessary errands were finished the steward came to the lobby with the luncheon all neatly packed in a nice box.

"And if that isn't enough," he said, with a glance in Mary Jane's direction, "maybe I can get the little ladies some ice cream when they come back this afternoon."

Mrs. Merrill and Mary Jane agreed to carry the lunch box between them—a block a-piece—because Alice had her camera to look after. They stopped just long enough to buy a new roll of films at the nearest shop

and then they set off down the pretty, narrow, old street.

The many palm trees, which Mary Jane insisted on calling "trees with trimming on the top," the gay poinsettias which bloomed everywhere and the crimson and yellow blossoms on the vines which covered porches and hedges made the street look very beautiful. Mary Jane had to pinch herself two or three times again to make sure that she really was awake! She simply couldn't realize that up at home her playmates were making snow forts and going to school.

"I think it's funny," said Alice thoughtfully, "why folks stay up north at all in the winter. Why doesn't everybody move south when it gets cold and then go back home in the spring?"

"Sounds sensible," laughed Mrs. Merrill, "and really very bird-like. But just think of all you'd miss! Snow at Christmas time,

skating, you know how you love to skate, and coasting and fireside fun—oh, you'd miss a lot!"

"I guess I would," admitted Alice, "but I do love the flowers! Wait a minute, Mother," she added; "I want to get a picture of that vine. See how it covers the house?" Mary Jane had gone on a few steps ahead, but Mrs. Merrill, feeling sure the little girl was safe on that quiet street, waited till Alice took the picture. But when they walked on Mary Jane was not to be seen. Had she turned the corner? No, for Mrs. Merrill hurried to look and no girl was in sight. Had she gone into one of the gardens? Surely not, for Mary Jane would never think of going into any one's yard without an invitation. Alice shut up her camera and hurriedly began to help hunt. Mrs. Merrill was just beginning to feel a little anxious when she heard Mary Jane's voice, close by, just inside the hedge, say,

"But please, first I have to tell my mother." Mrs. Merrill dashed into the yard, Alice close behind her, and both stood as though petrified with amazement.

At the foot of the steps leading from the house stood a woman dressed in the gorgeous long robes worn in Spain long years ago. By her side stood a Spanish courtier of olden days, apparently just about to kneel and kiss her hand. And, most astonishing of all, just back of the lady stood Mary Jane, her eyes round with excitement and delight.

"Mary Jane!" cried Mrs. Merrill, "what are you doing? Where are you? How did you come in here?"

"Through the gate just like you did, Mother," replied Mary Jane, answering the last question first, "and I came because he asked me to, he did." And she pointed her finger at a man who stood at Mrs. Merrill's left.

"The little girl is right," said the man as

he stepped up to Mrs. Merrill, "and I must ask your pardon for the fright we seem to have caused you. But I do beg of you to let us borrow your daughter for about five minutes more—we have such need of her."

Mrs. Merrill looked around the yard and saw what she had been too excited before to notice. In the front of the yard, close by the hedge, was a moving picture camera, and by it two men working under the director who was speaking to her.

"Let me explain," continued the man. "We are making a picture supposably taken in Spain—not a hard thing to imagine with all these Spanish houses and gardens around here,—and this lady is supposed to be a queen. But at the last minute, just as we were ready to run the picture through, the lady" (and he pointed to the courtly dressed woman by the steps) "wanted some ladies or children-in-waiting to carry her train. We have the robes but not the people here and I

have to get the picture done to-day. That explains why, when I looked out of the garden and saw your daughter I ventured to borrow her a minute. If we may use her long enough to throw a robe over her and get the picture of the queen so attended walking down the walk, I'll be very glad."

Mrs. Merrill was just about to refuse for she had no desire to have Mary Jane in a movie, when Alice nudged her and whispered, "Mother! Couldn't I be in it too?"

The director noticed the whisper and guessed what she was saying. "We'd like to have this little girl too," he said; "we have plenty of clothes for two and I'm sure if one train bearer is good, two will be better —isn't that so, Miss Arlson?"

The pretty lady in the queen's robe nodded and smiled and said she must have two maids, so the director hurried away to get the costumes. In a jiffy he was back and with two or three deft touches he tossed a

robe over each girl, covered Mary Jane's bobbed hair and Alice's braids with lace head-dresses and showed them where to stand behind the queen.

Then with a hurried "click, click, click, click, click, click!" the picture was taken and every one began to move about and talk. The girls almost hated to give up their pretty costumes and Mary Jane remarked as the director took hers off, "Those would make awfully nice 'dress-up clothes' I think!"

"Do you like to play dress-up?" asked the man.

"'Deed we do!" exclaimed Mary Jane heartily; "we like it most the best of anything!"

"Then you take these head-dresses you wore and keep them with my compliments," he said, and that is how it happened that two fine and interesting bits of Spanish lace were taken home from the southern trip.

"Mother!" exclaimed Alice when they were out on the street again, "did you ever hear of such fun? And to think it happened to *us!*"

"Being in a movie!" cried Mary Jane, "and riding a pony and swimming in a house —why just everything's happening to us! If Dadah doesn't come with us pretty soon there won't be anything left in the world to do."

"Don't you worry about that," laughed Mrs. Merrill; "I know two or three things left in the world to do. And it wouldn't surprise me a bit if you'd do them some day. But the thing we're doing right now, is seeing the oldest house in the United States. Alice, will you pound the knocker?"

They stopped short and there, sure enough, they had come to the queer, old house they had set out to see. Alice stepped up on the doorsill and awesomely pounded at the brass knocker. A pleasant faced old

lady opened the door and peered out at them.

"Why, don't I know you?" she asked as she spied Mrs. Merrill.

"I hoped you'd remember," replied Mrs. Merrill, "though I don't see how you do when you see so many folks every year. And I hoped you'd let my girls and me eat lunch by the old well as I did years ago."

"Indeed I will that," said the old lady cordially, "and they may pick flowers in my garden, too, though that's something very few folks are allowed to do. But first they want to see the house."

She took them all over the house, up stairs and down, and such a lot of quaint, queer old things the girls had never seen. Candle sticks hundreds of years old, cradles, dishes, andirons, pitchers, dresses, chairs, sewing baskets, spinning wheels, looms, knitting racks, tables, rugs—everything that one could think of as interesting and old seemed

to be crowded into that one small house. Mary Jane looked and looked and looked till everything she saw seemed a confusion of queer old things.

"I think I'd better stop looking, Mother," she said finally, "'cause the looks get all mixed up in my head."

"You're right, Mary Jane," said Mrs. Merrill sympathetically, "I'm getting tired looking myself. Let's go out into the garden and eat our luncheon."

Nobody, looking at the outside of the house, would have even guessed of the lovely garden behind the wall. There was an old well with its windlass and sweep, several gnarled old trees and shrubs and bushes and flowers in every corner. The little old lady was persuaded to come out into the sunshine and share the luncheon with them and she told them, while they ate, tales of the many famous folks who had visited this very same garden and picnicked by this very same well.

Then, after they had finished eating, she showed Mary Jane how folks, years ago, used to draw water from that same old well.

"I think it's lots more fun to get water out of a well this way than to turn on a faucet," said Mary Jane as she tried the windlass herself and drew up a brimming bucket.

"But what would you think," asked Mrs. Merrill, "of getting up early in the morning and coming out to draw the water for your bath?"

"Well," said Mary Jane doubtfully, "I'd think that would be different."

"I guess it would be," laughed Alice, "I know I'd think so!"

"Now I must get back to my work," said the little lady. "But make yourselves at home here. And remember, the girls may pick flowers if they wish." And she went back into the house.

Alice was happy at the chance to pick a few flowers as she had wanted to make a col-

lection of pressed flowers that would include every variety they saw on their trip. And in this one garden she found a sample of every single sort she had seen thus far and two or three new kinds besides. She took pictures of the garden and of Mary Jane at the well and then it was time to go.

As they walked back under the palm trees to the hotel Mary Jane said, "I think I'd like to live in this place all winter."

"I'd like that myself," said Mrs. Merrill, "but we can't. To-morrow morning, bright and early, we'll be going on. And if you ask me, I'll tell you that there's even more fun at the next place we go to—think of that!"

A DAY ON THE BEACH

IT was with great reluctance that Alice and Mary Jane accompanied their mother into the bus that was to drive them to the station the next morning. They had had so much fun in the three full days they had spent at dear old St. Augustine that it simply didn't seem possible there *could* be as good a time waiting any place else. It was a comfort though, to know that they might stop a day or two more at the old Spanish city on their way home. Mrs. Merrill was trying to plan it that way in the hope that Mr. Merrill could meet them there and have some of the fun with them. And that was the reason why they had saved the old fort till the next visit; Mrs. Merrill felt sure that Mr. Merrill could show the girls the won-

ders and traditions of the old place better than she could.

As the train sped southward through forests and fields Mary Jane forgot all about being sorry to leave St. Augustine and began to make plans for the new visit.

"What's the name of the place we're going to next, Mother," she asked as they settled themselves cosily on the big observation platform, "and what we going to do when we get there?"

"We're going to Daytona now, dear," replied Mrs. Merrill, "and if this fine weather keeps up you'll have a chance to swim in the really truly ocean to-morrow."

"Couldn't we do it to-day?" asked Alice who loved swimming.

"Not very well," answered her mother. "You see, Daytona isn't on the ocean. It's on a river that runs in from the ocean—I call it a river though it really is more of a long, slim bay. The beach where you'll go swim-

ming is a long way from the hotel where we will stop and to-day I think we'd better get a bit acquainted with Daytona. You'll like it I know."

And Mary Jane did like it very much. She liked it from the first minute she stepped from the train into the bus that was waiting to take them to the small hotel where rooms were reserved for them. She loved the broad, modern streets—so different from the narrow foreign looking ones that had charmed them at St. Augustine, she loved the many, many beautiful flower beds and the great trees that made the streets look like huge caves of green.

The bus was a bit crowded so the girls sat up on the driver's seat which they thought was a real lark. This driver was a nice northern boy of eighteen who by some chance had obtained the job of driving the bus for the winter. He told the girls that he had two sisters at home just their ages and

that he wished they would ride on the bus with him that afternoon because he got so homesick for his sisters.

After they had their luncheon Alice asked her mother if they could ride. She explained all about what the boy had told them, of course, and said that he had promised they could see the whole of Daytona—every bit—if they went with him that afternoon, because his errands were so scattered. Mrs. Merrill talked with friends who had been some days at the hotel and all spoke so well of the driver that Mrs. Merrill gave her consent. And a very proud and gay pair of little girls perched up on the front seat and drove away about two o'clock.

"Be very careful, girlies," said Mrs. Merrill, as the engine began to hum; "you know I'll be right here if you want anything. And Mary Jane, you must do what Alice says for she's always so good to you. Have a fine time!"

Tom surely did take them all over the town. They went down south first, out into the edge of the country, where they got a man who was to take a two-thirty train. Then they went north to take some folks who came on the same train that took the man away. Then they went east across one of the long bridges and then north and home over another one. Mary Jane liked those bridges. They were so nice and low and long. But that wasn't all. They were toll bridges and each time an auto went across the driver had to stop at the toll office and pay for the privilege of driving across. Mary Jane had never heard of such a thing before and she thought it awfully funny to pay to ride across a bridge.

By half past four, when Tom brought the girls back, they were old friends; they'd told him all about their trip so far and about their plans for swimming to-morrow. And they really felt very well acquainted with Day-

tona they had ridden around so much of it.

Bright and early the next morning the Merrills three were up and making ready for the trip to the beach. Mrs. Merrill planned to get their luncheon at the Casino by the bathing beach so there was little to attend to after breakfast. Bathing suits were tucked into a rubber bag and then, as soon as the postman had come with the morning mail, they set out for the beach. The girls were sure they could walk to the beach; it was only about two miles and they wanted to show their mother some of the sights they had seen the day before. And really, with seeing the great palm trees along the river and looking in the shop windows along Main Street and counting the planks on the bridge —Mary Jane was determined to count every board—the walk seemed no distance at all.

It was just about eleven when they reached the bath house and the crowd was already assembling. Such a jolly crowd it was

too, very happy, and gay, and full of fun. There were no high waves that day; just nice low ones, actually made for girls who were not used to the big ocean, and Mary Jane and Alice could hardly wait till they got into the water. It wasn't cold at all—of course it wouldn't be in that fine, warm sun, and they could safely wade and swim and play on the sand for an hour or more.

After the girls and Mrs. Merrill had been in the water till they were a bit tired, they sat down on the beach, near the water's edge, to rest awhile. Suddenly Mary Jane screamed. "Ugh! Mother! Look! See that funny bug!"

"Pooh!" exclaimed Alice laughingly, "it isn't a bug! It's a crawdad!"

"But look," cried Mary Jane; "he's gone!"

To be sure! Even as Mary Jane was watching him, the queer little crawdad had

"They went in wading after crawdads"

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quickly dug himself a hole in the ground and hidden down in it.

"It's like magic!" cried Mary Jane; "look! There goes another one!"

"Mary Jane, I'll tell you what let's us do!" exclaimed Alice, "let's find crawdads on the beach and then watch 'em dig in."

"What'll we put 'em in when we find 'em?" asked Mary Jane excitedly.

"Oh," Alice hesitated and looked around, "I know. Put them in here." She whisked off her rubber bathing cap and made it into a bag shape and ran down nearer the water to find the tiny crabs.

It wasn't hard to do. Each wave that rolled upon the beach left two or three of the queer little creatures, but one had to grab very quickly for the instant the water receded and left them stranded on the sand, they began to dig themselves in. Mary Jane grabbed at the sand and as fast as she

caught a crab she dropped it into Alice's cap.

"Don't they make your hands feel funny?" she asked as she held one a second more than she needed to. "I don't know if I like them and I don't know if I don't."

"Ugh!" exclaimed Alice. "I know I don't like to hold them but I do like to watch them dig. Come on, sis, we've a lot. Let's go back to mother and let 'em hide."

They raced back to where Mrs. Merrill had been sitting and dumped their trophies on the sand one at a time. And it really was funny to see those wiggling little crawdads squirm themselves out of sight in the sand in such a jiffy! Just a wiggle, wiggle, wiggle and they were gone—the sand closed up over them as though they had never been there. Mary Jane tried to poke her finger down into the sand and dig them up; but the crawdads were too smart for her and not a one did she find!

"Why don't you collect some shells to

take home," suggested Mrs. Merrill after awhile; "there are many pretty kinds here."

"I know it, Mother," answered Alice, "and I was just going to ask you if we could take any home when Mary Jane found these crawdads. Let's start now."

But just at that minute the whistle on the bath house blew for one o'clock—the girls hadn't guessed it was nearly that late and of course the minute they knew the time they were starving hungry.

"Then let's take one more dip to get the sand off," suggested Mrs. Merrill, "before we dress and have lunch. And while our suits dry, you may collect all the shells you are willing to carry."

Down into the water they ran and just in time too for when they heard a noise they looked up from the water and there, coming quickly to the earth, was a great aeroplane that landed right at the very spot where they had been sitting.

"I do think this is the excitingest beach," said Mary Jane in an awestruck voice; "first there's the ocean and then there's crawdads and then an airship. What do you suppose they'll have next?"

"Lunch, I hope," said Alice laughingly, "and I'll beat you to the bath house to dress for it."

Later when they had had their good luncheon and were sitting on the veranda of the Casino where they could watch the airship take on a passenger and sail away toward the north for a long flight, Mary Jane remembered about the shells.

"Of course we want to get some," said Alice; "let's go now."

"You girls start while I see about the bath locker," suggested Mrs. Merrill. "Maybe we can arrange to leave our things here till we come again; then we could carry more shells."

When she got down to the beach a little

later she found that the girls had already collected a great pile of shells from the many there were to be found on the beach.

"You wouldn't want to take any but perfect ones home, I'm sure," said Mrs. Merrill; "suppose we spread every shell out where it can be seen. Then we'll throw all the ones that are not perfect back into the ocean. The others we'll take home."

Alice and Mary Jane set to work examining the shells and they found that in their eagerness for collecting they had picked up a good many that were not worth carrying home. So it was quite a respectable sized pile they finally decided they wanted to take.

"There," said Mary Jane with a sigh of content, when the sorting was finished, "there they are and if it wasn't ten miles home, I'd be glad we had them."

"You'll be glad anyway, dear," said Mrs. Merrill, "because we're going to ride home.

I ordered a taxi when I was up at the bath house. Here it comes now."

And sure enough! There it was coming right down by the water to meet them. Mary Jane was sure the wheels would get stuck in the sand; but they didn't; they didn't even sink in. They just acted as though that beach was a regular road—which it wasn't.

It seemed fine to spin home over the beach, across the bridge and down the river street, and by the time home was reached Mary Jane was rested enough to play again. That was a good thing for who should she see on the hotel porch but Ellen, her little friend from St. Augustine.

"Why, Ellen!" she exclaimed as she ran from the taxi to greet her; "how did you get here?"

"On the train and the bus," said Ellen happily. "And mother's here too."

"We came down unexpectedly for two

days," explained Mrs. Berry, "because I found that a dear old friend of mine was here. Can't we all plan a picnic for to-morrow?" she added. "The girls will like it and I know a beautiful place to go—way down the beach and back into the woods."

"Oh, goody! Let's!" exclaimed Mary Jane, dancing happily; "let's have a picnic or something every day."

"Seems to me that's about what you are doing," laughed Mrs. Merrill, "but I'm ready for more fun." While the mothers planned the party, the three girls went off to find some fun of their own and to talk of what they would do at the picnic.

AT SEA IN A STORM

THERE seemed to be a great mystery about that picnic. Mrs. Merrill and Mrs. Berry wouldn't let the girls help with the baskets and even kind Mrs. Trudy, the hostess at the hotel, merely smiled and put her finger to her lips when the girls asked her what was going on.

"I think we ought to see what they're taking to eat," said Ellen as she hung on to the porch railing out in front; "maybe we won't like it."

"No danger," said Alice positively; "mother's there and she always makes nice lunches."

"But we ought to see it," insisted Ellen. "I tell you what let's do. There's a window in Aunt Sue's room" (Aunt Sue was Mrs. Berry's friend) "that opens onto a roof, a

low roof just by the kitchen. I know 'cause we had that room ourselves last year. Let's climb out the window and peep down into the kitchen."

"I don't know if mother'd like us to peek," replied Mary Jane doubtfully, "but we might climb out on the roof and see if we *could* peek. And then when we saw if we could we could decide about doing it."

"Anyway let's go," said Ellen, who had no particular scruples about peeking. So they ran up stairs and climbed out of Aunt Sue's window and sure enough, they could look right down into the kitchen without half trying. They saw Mrs. Merrill standing by a table and Mrs. Berry bending over a basket on a chair, but before they really had time to see what each was doing, Tom came out the kitchen door.

"Say, girls," he called, "want a ride? I have to go up to the store for paper napkins and your mothers say you may go along."

"Oh, dear," said Alice who, being the oldest felt responsible for letting the girls come out on the roof, "but we're not down ready to go."

"You will be in a minute," said Tom laughingly; "watch me." He went over to the orange tree near by, picked up the ladder that leaned against it and set the ladder up to the side of the house. "There you are, young ladies," he said proudly; "walk right down!"

"Ugh!" cried Ellen, "I'm scared to."

"No you're not," answered Alice; "it's fun to climb ladders. Here, let me go first and then I turn around and hold your hand and you won't be scared a bit."

Nor was she, for Alice showed her how to go down backwards so she could look up all the time and Ellen thought it so much fun that she wanted to climb up again just for the fun of coming down.

"Not to-day," said Tom, "for we have to be off. You help Mary Jane, Alice, while I get out the bus. They wanted us to hurry back with the napkins, you know, because they're almost through packing the picnic basket."

By the time they came back with the napkins the luncheon was all packed and the three ladies, hatted and ready to go, were sitting on the front porch waiting, so there was no more temptation to peek into the kitchen. In about five minutes the big seven-passenger car that was to take them on the trip, drove up and they all piled in.

"Should we take wraps?" asked Mrs. Merrill at the last minute.

"Wraps!" laughed Mrs. Berry; "look at the sun! We'll have sunshine all day if I'm any weather guesser."

Alice, being the oldest girl, sat on the front seat with the driver; Mary Jane and

Ellen had the two folding seats in the back and the three ladies had the long back seat to themselves.

"And don't put your feet into the lunch," warned Alice, as she leaned back and saw that the precious basket was right between the two little girls.

"Hump!" grunted Mary Jane, "think we want stepped-on lunch? We're just as particular about the basket as any older body, we are!"

First they drove across the bridge toward the ocean; then they turned and started down the long wide beach.

"We'll go along here this way for miles and miles," said the driver to Alice, "and if you watch you'll see queer things on the beach."

"Queer things?" questioned Alice; "what kind of things?"

Before the driver had a chance to answer he spied something he wanted the girls to

see and with a skid and a whirl he brought the car to a sudden stop right down by the edge of the waves.

"There," he said, pointing to a lump of something that lay on the sand, "that's what I mean. I'll get it for you." He jumped out of the car, picked up the messy looking thing and handed it to Alice. "It's a jelly fish," he explained; "there are lots of them washed up on the beach here. See, this is the way it sails on the water."

The girls looked at the thing in open eyed amazement. They couldn't realize that that queer looking mess that looked all the world like spoiled gelatine, could have been a creature sailing on the water.

"You just wait," laughed the driver; "I'll show you some out in the water before we turn off this beach." He kept his word, too. About a half mile farther down the beach he spied a live jelly fish riding the waves. When the girls saw *that* they thought first

he must be joking them for it looked quite a bit like a sail boat some child had made and which had tipped over and blown out to sea. But when he stopped the car they could see plainly that it was just such a creature as he had shown them before.

"They certainly do have queer folks down at this place," said Mary Jane, "queerer folks than live up at my home, I'm sure of that!"

Soon they turned off of the beach and went back across a bridge to a great orange orchard Aunt Sue wanted Ellen to see. The owner of the orchard was expecting them and he himself took them out to where oranges were being picked and then to the packing room where the golden fruit was scrubbed and sorted and packed. Mary Jane like the sorting the best of all.

"It's just like a marble game," she exclaimed excitedly as she watched the fruit come rolling down the trough. "See!

That little one goes in there and the middle sized one goes in *there* and the great big orange goes way down to the end. Let's stay and watch some more."

"Not this time," replied Mrs. Merrill regretfully; "if we are to have a picnic we must be on our way because it's nearly noon now."

The orchard man loaded the girls with oranges and tangerines for their lunch and urged them to come again some time. They sped along the hard shell road, passed inlet after inlet where the water from the ocean, rising now with the turn of the tide, came close up to the road; and finally they turned in at a clean, pretty woods and the car came to a standstill.

"This *is* a nice place," said Mrs. Merrill to Mrs. Berry, "and we're certainly glad you brought us along to your party. Girls, I'll race you to that oak tree!"

The girls, each one, had intended to suggest eating lunch the very first minute they

got out of the car; but they couldn't let a challenge like that go by. Off they raced, Alice leading easily as they neared the great tree which was the goal.

"Let's give her a handicap," Mrs. Merrill said, as they measured up how very much Alice had beaten; "she's so old she needs one." So they made Alice stand five feet behind as they raced back and then the race came out exactly a tie.

"I say the winners get a luncheon for a prize," suggested Mrs. Merrill, laughingly; "I think that's safe when we all won. don't you?"

While they had been racing, Mrs. Berry and her friend had spread the white table cloth and had unpacked most of the tempting food, so each girl dropped down by the nearest napkin and prepared to be served. No wonder the ladies had wanted to keep that lunch basket for a surprise—it was a meal fit for a king and each hungry eater was

loud in the praises of kind Mrs. Trudy who had given them such a feast. There was fried chicken, each piece frilled with white paper and rolled up by itself; and sandwiches and rolls and jelly and olives and pickles and salad and cake and, oh, just everything good a person could think of. And last of all the real surprise—a can of fine ice cream which not one had guessed was tucked in under the back seat; no one, that is, but the driver, whom Mrs. Trudy had let into the secret.

After lunch was over the girls gathered moss and shells and acorns; they played games and had such a good time that no one even thought of home or the sky or weather or anything like that till suddenly Mrs. Merrill noticed that the sun wasn't shining.

"We should have brought wraps after all!" exclaimed Mrs. Berry in dismay, "but who'd have guessed that this fine day would end in a rain. Come quick, girlies, we'll have

to bustle our things into the car in a jiffy and make for home. I know these southern storms and this starts out like a bad one."

Even as she spoke the sky grew suddenly blacker and a great flash of lightning lit up the woods with a weird light.

"I never saw anything so sudden!" cried Mrs. Merrill; "look! There's a drop of rain now! Hadn't we better put up the curtains on the car before we start? It would be a bad thing for us to get wet so far from home."

The three ladies helped and the girls held curtains from the inside so the job didn't take very long. But even that little time made a great difference. The great drops of water came faster and faster and the driver got soaked when he jumped out to lock the gate that led from woods to road.

"There's no one on the road, driver," said Aunt Sue, as they started north, "so let her out. The roads are good and we can get

home through the woods if you drive fast so as to make it before the roads get too soaked."

On they dashed; past bridges, woods, gullies and inlets. They were taking the inside road as that would get them home quicker than the beach road they had used coming down. The girls thought it was a lark to sit cuddled up safe and dry in the car while the lightning flashed and the rain beat upon the leather roof over their heads.

On they went, past more woods and orchards and creeks, all the time having near them on one side or the other the wide stretches of water that now, at high tide, came up so close to the road. The shell road made fine driving but no one, not even the driver who was used to that country, realized how very slick the road might be in such a storm. On, and on, through the lightning that lit up the dark shadows of the groves they raced past.

And then a sudden whirl—a slip—a splash! The car had skidded from the road into the bay and stood hub deep in a vast inlet of water.

WALKING THE PLANK

FOR a minute all seven folks in that car were too amazed to speak; then, suddenly every one began to talk at once.

"Will we sail out to sea?" asked Mary Jane.

"Driver, do you know when the tide is high?" from Mrs. Merrill.

"Of course, there'll be no one along this road while the storm lasts!" cried Mrs. Berry.

"Will we just sit here and drown?" exclaimed Ellen.

"I guess I'll swim ashore!" laughed Alice, who thought the experience a lark it was so unusual.

And as they talked the lightning flashed and sparkled; the thunder roared deafen-

ingly and the rain on the car and on the water around them made so much noise they had to yell to make each other hear.

Suddenly Mrs. Merrill happened to think of time. She glanced at her watch and exclaimed, "It's four o'clock! If I recall rightly from yesterday on the beach that's nearly high tide. If that's the case the water won't get any higher."

"What's tide?" asked Mary Jane.

"It's the rising and falling of the water, dear," said Mrs. Merrill. "Twice a day the water spreads out a few feet over the land and twice a day it goes back. Some other time I'll tell you more about it. If the water doesn't come up much deeper here we'll not be in any real danger and I think we'd better sit still till the storm goes over. Surely such a hard storm will not last long."

So they tried to settle themselves comfortably for a long wait. But it wasn't easy. The roar of the thunder and the water and

the weird light from the storm's bright flashes made them all uneasy. They played twenty questions and they counted the seconds on Mrs. Merrill's watch between the lightning and the thunder. But nothing seemed very interesting.

"I'll tell you what let's do," suggested Mrs. Berry, "let's talk about where we are going and what we plan to see before we go back up north. That will be fun."

And it was. Mrs. Merrill said she and the girls planned to go back to Jacksonville in a day or two where they hoped to meet Mr. Merrill.

"You don't mean to tell me," exclaimed Mrs. Berry, "that these girls are going home without a ride up the Ocklawaha? That seems a shame!"

"The Ocklawaha?" questioned Mrs. Merrill; "I don't believe I know that trip."

"Then you surely must take it," said Mrs. Berry; "the girls will love riding on that

great, queer boat through the wild forests where they can see alligators and snakes and turtles and orange groves and Indian battle fields and everything, right close at hand. When we get home I'll show you the folders."

"Do they have really truly alligators growing outside a fence?" asked Mary Jane, her eyes big with wonder.

"Do they?" answered Mrs. Berry vigorously; "you just wait and see! Alligators along the banks and in the water and right near the boat."

"Ugh!" exclaimed Mary Jane, as a sudden thought struck her; "are there any here?"

"I hope not," said Mrs. Berry with a shiver; "no, girls, I was just joking," she added as she saw the three girls glance fearfully at the water; "alligators like jungles and heavy vegetation. They would never

come up so near a road—you may be sure of that."

"Listen!" exclaimed Alice suddenly; "wasn't that thunder farther away?"

The driver loosened the front curtain and peered out. Yes, the storm was going away, that was plain to see. The thunder was getting fainter every minute, the lightning was only a glow and the rain had nearly stopped.

"I do believe it's going away as quickly as it came," said Aunt Sue hopefully. "What time is it now anyway?"

"Five o'clock," replied Mrs. Merrill; "how's the tide, driver?"

"Going down," he answered; "see? It's below the running board a-ready. I guess I'll see if I can start her up." He pressed the button on his starter and the wheels of the auto began to spin but the car didn't move an inch. "Just as I was afraid!" he

muttered; "stuck in the mud. I'll wade to shore and walk down the road till I come to a house where I can get help to pull us out. I reckon you'll all be safe enough." He pulled off his shoes and socks, waded to shore and set off up the road. By this time the rain had stopped and the sun was breaking through the clouds, so sitting in a car out in the water seemed much less dismal.

He hadn't been gone more than fifteen minutes before an auto pulled up in front of the stranded car and out jumped the driver and two men. "I met 'em up the road," their driver explained, "and we've brought a plank and a rope."

"Yes, we'll soon have you all out and a-riding home," said one of the men.

First they laid the great long plank from the road to the running board of the car. Then Mrs. Merrill, who had been loosening the curtains, stepped out to walk to shore.

"Better let the little lady go first to see if

it's all right," suggested the driver. "Here, Alice, your mother can hold you to start and I'll meet you to finish."

So Alice climbed out and holding tightly to her mother's out-stretched hand, started the scary looking walk to shore. The plank did tip and sway, but the men stood on the shore end so it would not slip and she made the journey safely.

"That wasn't hard a bit!" exclaimed Alice; "I'd like to do it again!"

"One at a time, please, one at a time," laughed the driver. "You'll be playing pirate first thing you know—I remember I used to read about walking the plank in pirate books, though goodness knows it wasn't anything like this! Who's coming next?"

Mrs. Merrill lifted Mary Jane out and set her on the plank; then she walked close behind and held onto the little girl's shoulders as they slowly crept to shore. Mrs.

Berry came next with Ellen held in front of her the same way and last of all Aunt Sue. Then the men waded out, tied the heavy rope onto the car, fastened it onto their own machine and with a great tugging and pulling and jerking the car was pulled loose from the river bed and dragged up onto the road.

"There you are!" exclaimed one of the men, "all ready to drive. Now, young man," he said to the driver, "suppose you see if your engine's damaged and then we'll be going." While the driver inspected his engine Mrs. Merrill paid the two men for their trouble so that when the engine was found to be unharmed they started home at once. The water had drained off the hard shell roads very quickly and the drive home was not half so unpleasant as might have been expected.

In a very short time they came to a stop in front of their own hotel. "Well, I surely

am glad to be back!" exclaimed Mrs. Merrill.

"And we surely are glad to have you here safe and sound!" cried good Mrs. Trudy coming out to greet them. "We've all been anxious about you. Did the storm hit your way?"

"Did it?" answered Mrs. Merrill; "ask the girls!"

The three girls began talking at once and it was a wonder Mrs. Trudy could hear a thing.

"I just knew something had happened when you were so late," she said when the girls stopped for breath. "And you must be starved—did you know it's after seven? I saved some hot dinner for you so run right in and eat it."

Other guests had long finished eating but they followed the little party into the dining room and listened to the story of the exciting experience. But after dinner was

eaten and the story had been told and re-told till every one had heard it many a time, the girls found they were tired and nobody, for a wonder, objected when Mrs. Merrill suggested going to their rooms.

"Oh dear," said Mrs. Trudy, suddenly, "where did he put that box? Tom had something for you, Mary Jane, and he was so particular you should have it first thing when you came home but for the life of me I don't know where it is!" She hunted around diligently for a minute or two and then said, "Well, he must have taken it off with him. You'd better get to bed, little lady, so you can get up early in the morning and see what it is."

"Can't you tell?" coaxed Mary Jane.

"Tell!" exclaimed Mrs. Trudy. "I should say I couldn't! Tom will tell you himself because it's his. He comes early you know, so you may come down the first

minute you are dressed and I'll wager he'll be looking for you."

"Won't you even *hint?*" asked Mary Jane as she started up the stairs.

"Well," laughed Mrs. Trudy, "I might tell you that it's alive and it's red or brown or green or yellow—I don't know which just at this minute—if that's any help to you."

"I guess I might as well go to bed," said Mary Jane after she had thought hard for a minute, "'cause that doesn't help a bit. I guess I'll just have to go to bed and get up in the morning, I guess I will."

CATCHING THE BOAT

WHEN Mary Jane went down stairs the next morning she spied a queer looking box with holes cut in the sides lying on the big table in the office.

"Now I wonder if that's it?" she thought. "And I wonder if I can look at it now."

Fortunately, she didn't have to wonder long. Tom was sitting in a corner reading the paper while waiting for her and as soon as he heard her whisper he bobbed up and said good morning.

"Look what I've got for you!" he exclaimed as he gave her the box. "No," he added as he saw she hesitated about taking the cover off, "you don't need to be afraid. I think he's too sleepy to run away. Look and see what it is."

Mary Jane carefully lifted off the cover and there inside, nestled down on the grass, was a tiny little creature, about three inches long, with bead-like black eyes and a tail fully as long as his body.

"What is it?" cried Mary Jane; "it looks like a baby alligator only they're brown."

"Yes, it does look something like that," agreed Tom, "but it isn't an alligator. It's a chameleon."

"A chameleon?" repeated Mary Jane; "what's a chameleon?"

Alice came running down the stairs just in time to hear what Mary Jane said. "I know," she cried eagerly, "it's a creature that changes its color."

"But this doesn't change any color," said Mary Jane skeptically; "this'n green."

"Yes," said Tom, "because it's on green grass. You just wait and I'll show you." He picked up the little creature by its tail and, holding it gently, laid it on the brown

table cover. To the girls' amazement the brilliant green color faded and like magic the creature before them was all of brown.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mary Jane, in an awe-struck voice; "what makes it do it?"

"They say," replied Tom, "that it's got a set of air cells that catch the color of whatever the creature's on. But I don't believe they really for sure certain know what *does* do it."

"But that's not yellow!" said Mary Jane, remembering that Mrs. Trudy had said three colors.

"Of course not," laughed Tom, "because the table cover's brown. Here, you put it on Alice's yellow dress and see what happens."

Very gingerly, Mary Jane picked up the little creature and laid it in Alice's lap. And sure enough! Like magic again the chameleon changed its color—this time a golden yellow that was streaked a bit with

brown at the sides—made it look utterly unlike the green animal Mary Jane had first seen in the box.

"I think that's the wonderfulest thing I ever saw," she exclaimed. "I'm just going to change it around all day and see what it does."

Fortunately Mrs. Merrill had made no special plans for that day. She thought that if they were to take the boat trip so recommended to them, the girls had better have a day of rest and quiet play before they set off. So Mary Jane had plenty of time to play with her chameleon to her heart's content. Later in the morning, Tom found one for Alice too and they made a nest for them out in the fern box on the big front porch.

There were things to do besides play with the chameleons too. The yard was full of squirrels which would eat out of the girls' hands. And back of the house a beautifully

shaded canal proved to be the home of many sorts and sizes of turtles. So interesting did the girls find their play that they didn't care to leave it even for a walk up town when Mrs. Merrill decided that she would go up and get the boat tickets for to-morrow.

The first thing Mary Jane heard the next morning was her mother's voice saying, "Alice! Mary Jane! Do wake up quickly! We've over slept and the train goes in an hour and a half. Lucky I packed up the trunk and all your shells last night for we'll have to fly now."

The girls tumbled out of bed in a jiffy. They had talked with folks in the hotel the evening before about the Ocklawaha River trip and they were eager to take it. So it needed no urging to get them tubbed and dressed and down to the dining room in short order.

"You've plenty of time," said Mrs. Trudy reassuringly; "your trunk will go right now

—I'll tend to that and Tom is ready to drive you to the station, so take your time at breakfast. The train doesn't go till nine, you know."

Later Mrs. Merrill had looked over her mail and the girls had said good-by to all their new friends and were just getting into the station bus when the telephone rang. "Train's an hour late," said Mrs. Trudy as she hung up the receiver, "aren't you glad you did not rush more?"

"But will that give us plenty of time to make the boat?" asked Mrs. Merrill; "let's see—two hours for the trip and the boat goes at twelve forty-five. Yes, that ought to be plenty of time. Girls, you may run out and take a last look at your chameleons if you like." That was welcome permission. Of course they had wanted to take the chameleons home with them but Mrs. Merrill thought it wasn't possible as they were stopping so many places en route. But it was

fun to hunt them up and play a few minutes with their changing colors.

As the minutes went by Mrs. Merrill became uneasy and a second telephone message bringing news that the train was an hour and a half late confirmed her suspicion that they might have trouble making connections.

"I think I'll phone the agency where I got the tickets," she said finally. "Perhaps they will wire and have the boat held for us." The ticket lady was most reassuring and was certain that the boat would wait so Mrs. Merrill felt comforted. But it was eleven o'clock when the train finally came and it lost more time all the way up.

"Girls," said Mrs. Merrill, as they neared their station at half past one, "get your bags and camera ready for a dash. If I see a car anywhere around the station I'll take it in a jiffy and we'll drive as fast as possible for that boat. I have an uneasy feeling that

they won't wait this long for us and I don't want to lose a minute's time."

They stepped off the train the instant it stopped and Mrs. Merrill ran toward a small car that, with chugging engine and waiting driver, stood near by.

"Will you take us to the boat?" she cried eagerly.

"Sure, lady," said the driver cheerfully; "pile right in."

Grabbing the luggage the girls carried, a small bag and Alice's camera, Mrs. Merrill tossed it with her own bag into the back, pushed the girls in and, jumping in herself, slammed the door behind her. And that same instant a man who evidently had been up at the front of the train jumped in the front seat by the driver, and with a lurch the car dashed away.

"The boat, you know," said Mrs. Merrill as soon as she got her breath; "we want the Ocklawaha boat."

"Sure, lady," said the man, "we'll make it." He waved a yellow telegram before her, but with the jolting of the car and the rush of the wind, Mrs. Merrill couldn't tell what it said nor could she hear the rest of his words.

"Well, no use getting excited," she said, sitting back where she could brace herself better. "Evidently they wired to meet us here and that certainly was thoughtful. Hang on to the seat there, Mary Jane, or you'll bounce out, child," she added quickly as an extra big lurch of the car threatened to toss Mary Jane out over the side.

On they dashed through the noon sunshine: past houses and streets and out into the open country. And no sign of a boat landing anywhere.

"Something's wrong, I know," said Mrs. Merrill with concern. "I know we've been at least four miles and the boat landing was

only two miles from the station. They've got to stop and tell me where they are going." She braced herself firmly and then reached front and shouted to the driver.

"Stop! Stop right here! I told you I want to go to the boat landing and you're not taking us in that direction."

The driver slowed up a bit so they could talk better but he didn't stop. The man with him swung around in his seat and began to explain.

"The boat isn't at the landing, lady," he said much to Mrs. Merrill's dismay; "she left an hour back."

"Then where are you taking us?" demanded Mrs. Merrill.

"To the boat," he said. "You see it's this way, lady. The first part of that trip is on the St. John's River and right here" (he swung his arm off to the left) "the river makes a bend. We had to let the boat go

on time because folks don't like to wait, but we'll take you across the bend straight, you see, and catch the boat at the first stop. We can do in half an hour in this car what it takes her about an hour and a half to do on the water. Never you fear, now, you'll catch the boat right enough, lady."

"Then we might as well enjoy the ride," said Mrs. Merrill to the girls as, fairly satisfied with his explanation, she settled back in her place.

"If you call this enjoying," laughed Alice, as she tossed from front to back as they sped over the rough road.

"Here," said Mrs. Merrill, "let me sit in the middle and hold each of you." Alice moved over and Mrs. Merrill sat in the middle of the seat with an arm around each girl. "Now we have the fun of knowing that if any one bounces out we all will!"

None too soon did they brace themselves

either, for at that minute the driver turned off from the road into a woods. If the road had been rough, there's no describing the roughness of the rude path they followed through the woods. Hardly more than a trail it was and over it they bumped and tossed and hurried down a hill, through the trees and out onto a rude dock on the bank of a great river.

"Boat come yet?" asked the driver of a lone fisherman.

"Yeh," he replied, "she come an' gone fifteen minutes er-go!"

Mrs. Merrill exclaimed with dismay but the driver didn't stop for consultation. With a whirl of his wheel that sent the car spinning he turned around and dashed back up the hill.

"Girls," said Mrs. Merrill solemnly, "I think he's crazy. But all I can see for us to do is to sit still and hang together. Maybe

sometime we'll get somewhere—let's hope. Here, Mary Jane, snug up close so you won't bounce out!"

And turning onto the road, the car dashed off toward the south.

ON THE OCKLAWAHA

IT seemed to Mary Jane that she surely must be in a funny dream. It couldn't be possible that folks, really live, wide-awake folks, would go racing over the country in a strange car as they were racing; and she glanced up at her mother questioningly to see if she too was thinking it queer. But Mrs. Merrill, her arms around her two daughters, was looking straight ahead in a puzzled way and Mary Jane couldn't guess what she was thinking about.

The little car raced on. Through sandy roads that would have stalled a heavier machine; across bridges; through woods dim with the shelter of moss laden trees; by small fields where they caught glimpses of tiny truck gardens—they dashed.

"Government camphor reservation!"

shouted the driver over his shoulder as they drove between rows and rows of low, close-cropped trees set in neat orderly fashion and the Merrills got a whiff of the smell of camphor as they rushed by the rough factory where the camphor leaves are crushed to make the drug so many folks use.

"Now we'll *have* to stop!" said Mrs. Merrill with a sigh of relief as they swung around a short curve and came upon a toll bridge at the end of which stood an old man, hand out-stretched for his fee. But she didn't know the driver! He didn't intend to stop for mere toll—not he!

"Pay you on the way back," shouted the driver and on they rode.

After what seemed, oh at least a day! but which really was only an hour, the car slowed up in a tiny village and rolled down a hill to a fishing dock by the St. Johns river.

"There we are!" said the driver as he brought the car to a full stop and, jumping

out, opened the door with a flourish. "In plenty of time too, I'll say!" He helped Mrs. Merrill and the girls out, then rubbing his hands in satisfaction added, "I guess that'll please him—no, lady," as he saw Mrs. Merrill reaching for her purse; "you don't owe me a cent—not a cent! Glad to do it for him!"

"For who?" asked Mrs. Merrill, puzzled but greatly relieved because she had begun to be anxious about the hole this ride might leave in her pocket book!

"For Mr. Merrill," replied the driver, "aren't you Mrs. C. F. Merrill?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Merrill, still puzzled.

"Just so," replied the driver; "well, you see, last time he was down here I was a-working in Jacksonville and he did me a good turn. Now I'm a workin' with the boat folks and when we see by the agent's telegram that it's you that's late, seys I to them, 'Now's when I do *them* a good turn'—see?

So here you are and the boat'll be comin' along in a minute."

"I hope it does," said Alice.

"And I hope it's got a pantry on it cause I'm about starved," said Mary Jane fervently.

"Sure faith!" exclaimed the man; "of course you are and it's most four o'clock! Well, let's see what we can do for you!" He turned to go up the hill in the hope that he might find some fruit in an orchard near at hand, but he hadn't gone a dozen steps before a long, low whistle in the distance sent him hurrying back.

"There she comes!" he shouted, "I hear her! Look!"

Mrs. Merrill and the girls looked up the river and sure enough, swinging around the bend of the river was the boat they were waiting for. The driver and his companion hurried down to the dock and put up a great red flag they found in the dock house, then

fearing that that might not be enough, they brought the dust robe from the car and waved it too. In a couple of minutes a reassuring "toot-toot!" from the boat gave back the answer they were waiting for and they knew the captain had seen their signal and would stop at the dock.

There was just time to thank the men for the ride, which, now that it was safely over, the Merrills realized had been a very interesting one, and to get bags and camera from the car before the boat sidled up to the dock.

"Can't stop to tie up!" shouted the Captain, as the boat brushed the weather worn dock; "jump aboard!" There was just barely time for the Merrills to jump from the dock to the broad open lower deck; then a bell rang, the engines again began working and the space between boat and dock widened—they were off. Mary Jane and Alice waved good-by to the men on the dock and

Mrs. Merrill turned to greet the waiting captain.

"I am afraid you have had a hurried ride," he said, politely, "but the gentleman yonder," he waved his hand toward the dock, "who is now our advertising man, was sure he could meet us at the other dock and he wanted you to take the trip. It seems he feels indebted to your husband."

"We certainly are indebted to him," said Mrs. Merrill, "for the nice ride—though it did seem a bit hurried at the time" (she smiled at the girls as they all thought of the wild jolting!)—"and for getting us to the boat in time. We go back north soon and we would have been sorry to miss the trip. But I wonder if my little girls could have some lunch—they haven't had a bite since breakfast."

For answer the captain rang a bell for the steward and the order he gave made the

girls hungrier than ever. "Ham," he said, "browned to a turn, all the fresh eggs they can eat and some of your good biscuits. Can you have that in twenty minutes?"

"Yis sir, yis sir, bery good, sir!" said the darky steward, smiling broadly at the hungry folks, "and if you like, sir, they's jest a few more strawberries than I'll be a needin' fo' suppa to-night. If the little ladies would like to eat them a-while they're a-waitin'?"

Would they? Mary Jane's face shone and Alice smiled so sweetly that the steward nearly tumbled over his feet in his eagerness to get them comfortably settled at once. Upon the broad second deck a table was set —"we won't ask you to sit in doors this time of day," said the captain, "because you'll want to see the scenery as we just now turn from the St. Johns into the Ocklawaha." And on the table were three big dishes of great, red, luscious strawberries.

"Yumy yum!" exclaimed Alice; "Mother, do you know what Dadah did to get us all this?"

"I haven't an idea," replied Mrs. Merrill; "he's always doing things for folks, I know, but I never heard him speak of anything special down this way. Whatever he did though, I'm glad he did it—it certainly is lucky for us that these folks have good memories."

Mary Jane and Alice felt like queens as they sat there eating their berries and real cream and smelling the odors of broiling ham that came invitingly up the companionway.

"I'm glad we hurried up and got the boat!" exclaimed Mary Jane appreciatively as she scraped up the last bit of cream and the last half berry she had saved for a final tit-bit, "and I'm *very* glad we're on a boat that has a pantry, *I* am!"

"Wouldn't you like to look over the boat

and find your rooms?" asked the captain some half an hour later; "in a few minutes we'll be turning into the narrow Ocklawaha and then all my attention will be taken up with the steering. I like to have all my passengers comfortably settled so they will feel at home aboard."

Mrs. Merrill, Alice and Mary Jane followed him around the boat which they thought the most curious they had even seen. It looked like a great two story house with porches front and back and a pilot house set on the upstairs front porch. Of course it was flat bottomed, for the small river they would travel was too shallow in places for any other sort of boat. The captain told them that even though it drew but two feet of water it often went aground and had to be pushed off shore by means of great poles —"that's the reason we have to carry such a big crew," he added.

Inside were two floors with bedrooms—

staterooms Mary Jane found they were called—all around the sides of each. Mrs. Merrill's rooms, two of them, were side by side on the upper floor; that was nice for it was easy to speak through the thin wooden wall that was the only partition.

"But I see the wooden shutter is nailed shut," said Mrs. Merrill as she stepped into the larger room and attempted to raise the old fashioned sliding shutter. "We're fresh air fiends, Captain," she explained laughingly, "and I guess I'll have to trouble you to raise that blind."

"Well, er—well," said the captain hesitatingly.

"Of course if it's too much trouble," said Mrs. Merrill, in a puzzled voice.

"Not a bit," answered the captain, "not a bit. But you see, in the night we go through pretty wild country and the trees over-hang the boat. It doesn't often happen," he added half apologizing, "but occasionally a

snake drops off a tree and gets in if the window is open."

"Ugh!" shivered Mrs. Merrill, "between snakes and no air, I think I'll take the poor air *one* night! I had no idea we were going through such wild regions!" she added a bit skeptically.

When they returned to the deck after they had arranged their bags and seen to covers for the night, they were amazed at the difference in the scenery. The boat had left the big St. Johns River and was twisting and turning up the winding little Ocklawaha which was wild enough to satisfy any one. The girls found two other children on the deck, Ned and Katherine Ritter of New York, and the four of them sat at the very front of the boat and kept count of the creatures, snakes, turtles, squirrels and wild hogs that they saw on the bank. Ned counted the snakes because they were the worst. Alice had the turtles because they were the

hardest to see; Katherine did the squirrels and Mary Jane the hogs—she liked those the best because they made such fearful grunting noises—noises that made a person glad they were on a boat counting instead of walking in those deep woods.

After supper the passengers all came out on the deck again and the deep night of the forest was weirdly lit up by a great searchlight that flashed from the top of the boat; it made the trees and mosses look like a great fairyland of dreams.

"Couldn't I just go to sleep in my chair here?" asked Mary Jane when her mother suggested bed time; "I'm so comfy here."

"Indeed no!" laughed Mrs. Merrill; "you'd be stiff as a poker in the morning. I'll go in with you and Alice and stay till you get in bed, then in about an hour I'm coming to bed too. You know we want to be up early in the morning."

"What do we do in the morning?" asked

Mary Jane, slipping out of the chair and taking her mother's hand.

"Oh, we ride on the boat till ten o'clock and then we stop at an orange grove and then we ride some more. And I shouldn't wonder but what we'd see some of those alligators you've been wanting to see. To-morrow's the time for them."

"Then I'll go to bed quick," said Mary Jane willingly, " 'cause I want to be up and see 'em before Ned does. 'Cause the first one who see 'em gets to count 'em."

"Good night, Mr. Captain," she called as they passed the pilot house, "I'm going to see alligators in the morning." And in barely ten minutes, Mary Jane was sound asleep.

"HELP YOURSELVES, CHILDREN! HELP YOURSELVES!"

"THOSE girls won't be awake for an hour yet!" said a voice just outside Mary Jane's window the next morning; "I'll bet I see the first alligator all right!" But Ned Ritter shouldn't have been so sure! He little guessed that as he was taking his early morning walk around the boat with his father, he made that rash remark just outside the Merrill girls' window. And still less did he guess that Alice, just waking up, heard him.

"Mary Jane! Mary Jane!" she whispered; "let's get up!"

No answer.

"I'll have to wake her," said Alice to herself. She bent over the edge of the upper

berth where she was sleeping and gave Mary Jane's elbow a vigorous pull. Mary Jane was that surprised she sat straight up in bed even before she opened her eyes.

"Where is it?" she asked, evidently thinking of alligators.

"Goodness knows!" laughed Alice in a more natural voice now, for Ned and his father had walked out of hearing. "But if we want to see anything first, we'd better be getting up, Mary Jane, because Ned's out on deck and maybe Katherine is too."

"Let's ask mother if we can't get up now," suggested Mary Jane and she tapped on the partition. They had made up a code before they went to bed the night before so Mrs. Merrill knew exactly what they meant to say. One tap meant "Mother, are you there?" two taps meant "Please I want a drink," and three taps meant "Is it time to get up?"

"I was just listening for those taps," said

Mrs. Merrill, at the door of the stateroom; "open the door, girls, and I'll help you dress. I'm all ready and you want to get out doors as soon as you can—it's a beautiful morning!"

With her help at buttons and with their hair the dressing business went very quickly and in a very few minutes all three were out on the deck.

"No alligators yet," Ned's disappointed voice greeted them.

"I should say not!" laughed the captain who went by just in time to hear what was said. "Wait till the sun gets up high and the air is hotter—then you'll see them! Had breakfast yet?"

After breakfast he took the four children up by his pilot house and let them sit on a bench there that gave them a fine view of the river and woods. But though they looked and watched till their eyes ached, not a 'gator did they see!

"I don't believe there are any," exclaimed Alice in disgust, "and I'm going to walk around the back of the boat. When we go around that bend we're coming to I'm sure I can pull some leaves off that great tree. And I'd love to have them in my collection—'leaves pulled from the boat on the Ocklawaha'—wouldn't that look well in my book?"

"I think I'll go too," said Katherine, who, when she saw how interested Alice was in her collection, immediately wanted to make one for herself.

"I think I'll fish," said Ned; "Father said once he caught a turtle from the boat." And he too disappeared from the captain's deck.

Mary Jane, left alone, couldn't quite make up her mind what to do. It wasn't any fun staying up there all alone, for the captain was so busy with his steering that he wasn't a bit of company; she had a notion to go to

the back of the boat with the other girls.

Just as she was slipping down from the bench she heard a splash at the bank on the south side of the river, and looking quickly, she spied a great log floating slowly down the stream.

"What made that log fall in?" she asked curiously; "I didn't see anybody push it!"

Splash! There went another one!

"Funny!" exclaimed Mary Jane to herself now much interested; "now what made *that* one go, I wonder." Just then Mrs. Merrill came to the foot of the ladder leading to the captain's deck.

"All right, Mary Jane?" she asked; "want some company?"

" 'Deed yes, Mother," cried the little girl; "do come up here and see these funny logs! What makes them fall into the river when nobody pushes them? There!" she exclaimed, excitedly, "there goes another one!"

Mrs. Merrill looked quickly to where Mary Jane pointed and was just in time to see—a great alligator go sliding into the water!

"Those aren't logs," she said, "those are alligators, chi'd! Quick! Let's call to the others so they can see them too!" But just as she spoke the captain's voice rang out, "Alligators on the left!" and all the passengers rushed over to see the great creatures as they floated, log-like, down the river.

"That was a good sight," said the captain; "you must be a mascot, Mary Jane; because we haven't seen three together yet this season."

The Merrills found the trip all that it had been promised them. They saw great virgin forests where the trees locked arms over the river; they saw Indian battlefields and Indian burying grounds and then later in the morning, the forests cleared away and about eleven o'clock the boat stopped by an

orange grove and everybody piled off for refreshments.

"Eat all you can," said the owner cordially, "but all you want to carry away, you have to pay for. Just help yourselves, children, help yourselves!" he added as the children hesitated.

"Goody!" said Alice; "this is the first time I ever had the chance to save money by eating! Come on, Mary Jane, let's begin!"

The pretty little orchard lay on the side of a hill and the orange and lemon and tangerine and kumquot trees were set in neat rows on either side of the walk that led up to the house at the top. The trees were young and the children could easily reach the branches and pick their own fruit.

"I like oranges best," said Katherine, running to a pretty orange tree.

"I'm after tangerines," called Alice as she spied a tree of her favorites not far away.

"Well, I don't want lemons—sour old

things!" exclaimed Mary Jane when she saw that she had picked the wrong tree; "I want those little things."

"Kumquots," said Mrs. Merrill; "I do too, dear. Here's a tree."

It was fun to pick the fruit directly from the long hanging branches; and still more fun to suck the sweet juice with which the golden fruit was filled.

"Who'd have guessed," exclaimed Alice, "that tangerines could be so juicy—not I!"

But after a little while, appetites were satisfied and the children wanted to play.

"I'll tell you what let's do," suggested Mary Jane after she had eaten about a dozen kumquots and had decided that she simply couldn't eat another suck; "let's play house and each tree'll be a house and that great big old tree'll be a hotel."

"And we'll dress up and be queens and go to visit," added Alice.

"How you going to dress up in an orange

orchard where there aren't any clothes?" asked Katherine.

"Oh, you don't have to have real clothes to dress up in—not every time, you don't," said Mary Jane scornfully; "Alice can fix it—you see!" and she turned to hear her sister's plan.

"We'll make crowns out of orange leaves," said Alice, quickly picking a few and weaving them together; "see how pretty and glossy they are. Just put them on your head this way, Katherine. There! That's becoming! Now you make a bigger one and I'll do one for Mary Jane and for me. You girls pick the leaves for me so I can make them quickly."

"Then if we're queens we shouldn't live in a house, should we?" asked Katherine.

"I should say *not!*" exclaimed Mary Jane. "These aren't houses," she added, waving her hand grandly toward the trees nearest at hand; "these are palaces—your palace and

Alice's palace and mine. And that big one over there we were going to have be a hotel, it's a banquet hall now."

Just as the royal play was getting well under way a man came around with paper bags. "Put all the fruit you want to buy in these," he announced, "and pay for it at the dock when you get aboard the boat."

"Let's not bother," said Katherine; "we don't want to stop playing."

"We don't have to," replied Alice laughingly, and she picked up the bag the man had laid under her tree; "these are cloth of gold sacks and we'll fill them with gold nuggets to take to the good queen mother."

"Why, so we can!" cried Katherine happily; "come on, let's hurry and get a lot!"

It was a good thing they did hurry for even so the boat's great whistle sounded before the bags were full and the captain's call through a megaphone urged them to hurry aboard.

"Well, seems to me you don't intend to be hungry for a few days," said Mrs. Merrill laughingly as she saw what full bags the children were carrying. "I thought you were too busy playing to pick any and so I got enough for us all. But never mind," she added, as she saw the girls were looking disappointed; "it's all so good and it's wholesome eating too, so we'll keep it if you don't mind carrying it."

The rest of that day's wonderful ride seemed to Mary Jane like living in a picture show. Not long after they left the orange orchard the great boat turned into the tiny Clear River that runs into the Ocklawaha and it almost seemed as if the broad decks were spreading over the whole of the little stream! Here the water was clear as crystal and the girls could see every fish and turtle and water snake that scurried out of their way as they steamed up stream. In the

bright noon sunshine they came into the little lake at the head of the stream and there they got out of the big boat and were rowed around in a small glass bottomed boat. It seemed awfully queer to look through the glass at their feet and see the bubbling of the hidden springs and to watch the bright colored pebbles and stones that tumbled about deep down among the rocks like gay pieces of confetti tossed about in the sunshine.

Then there was the scramble into the big touring car, the drive across country to Ocala, luncheon at the queer station dining room where Mary Jane, for the first time in her life, had the fun of sitting up to a counter to eat, and the rush for the train that was to take them up to Jacksonville and Dadah.

"Well," said Mary Jane with a sigh of relief as she sank into the comfortable Pullman seat, "I just a-going to sit here all after-

noon and think and think and think—I am!" But she didn't count on the many queer things that may happen in Florida.

PIGS BY THE WAY

FOR more than an hour Mary Jane sat and thought as she had planned to; she thought of all the interesting sights she had seen since she left home; she thought of the new friends she had made and of the fun she had had playing in the many places she had been. Then suddenly it occurred to her that their train was standing still.

"Doesn't this train go like regular trains, Mother?" she asked.

"Evidently not," replied Mrs. Merrill, who also had been noticing how much time was being lost; "we stop at every corner store, I do believe, and wait to chat about the weather."

Mary Jane laughed at the idea of a train stopping to talk about the weather.

"What's it saying now?" she asked and she sat up straight and looked out of the window. Such a sight! "Yumy yum, yum!" she cried eagerly. "Mother, may we have some too?"

Mrs. Merrill and Alice had been watching out the window while Mary Jane had been thinking and resting so they knew just what she meant. On either side of the train, stretching as far as a person could see, were rows and rows and rows of—strawberries. Strawberries so big and red and ripe and luscious that they could be seen—those on the nearest vines of course—from the train window. And all the strawberry plants near and far showed signs of being loaded with fruit. Over the rows bent the pickers, busily working, and here and there were groups of workers sorting and packing the berries into boxes and crates ready for shipping.

"Oh, Mother!" exclaimed Mary Jane, "I'll bet they're taking them onto our train! I just know they are."

"To be sure!" agreed Mrs. Merrill, "that's the reason we stop so often. This is the strawberry and lettuce country and every time we stop we take on piles of express that will go to hungry folks up north. Now you know how we get our early lettuce and berries and what sort of a place it comes from."

"Yes, I know it," said Mary Jane, "but couldn't we eat some now."

"Yes, Mother, couldn't we?" urged Alice, "just look at those berries!" she added as a team of horses pulled a great wagon by their window—a wagon piled high with crates of strawberries, as they could tell by the glimpses of red fruit inside.

Just then a little negro boy came by their window peddling berries and Mrs. Merrill was able to buy a box of berries for the girls

—berries so clean and sweet and ripe that they could be eaten at once without a thought of washing or of sugar.

As the train pulled up for another stop some fifteen minutes later, the Pullman conductor came into their car and spoke to Mrs. Merrill.

"There's something at this stop that your girls may enjoy seeing," he said, "and if you will allow me to escort you—"

"Something my girls should see?" questioned Mrs. Merrill in surprise.

"You see, madam," explained the man, "the cook on the diner we carry has made friends with the pigs on the way and he always likes the children aboard the train to see the fun."

"Sounds like Greek to me," said Mrs. Merrill still more puzzled, "but if there is something my girls should see, let's see it—we don't want to miss anything!" And taking Mary Jane's hand and motioning Alice

to come too, she followed the conductor through the train.

They went through two cars, then, as the train was just jerking to a stop, the man quickly pulled open the vestibule door and hurried them down the steps to the ground. Ahead of them—just the next car—was the diner. At the high door of the kitchen end of the diner stood a grinning negro. He was dressed all in spotless white and his face fairly shone with joy. In his hands he held a great bucket which was poised as though he was about to empty it out of the door.

"Here you be, missies!" he shouted, grinning and nodding to the children; "now you jes' watch—here she comes! Here she comes! Betta watch out her way!"

Just at that instant Mrs. Merrill heard a great grunting behind them and dodged out of the way of a great hog who, grunting and sniffing and puffing, was rooting her way along the side of the train.

"She knows me!" shouted the cook from his doorway; "now you jes' watch!"

No need to tell folks to watch! With that great creature grunting near (though the girls did notice that she seemed tame enough) nobody wanted to look at anything else! The hog sniffed along till she found the dining car door; then, with a snort of satisfaction, she raised up on her hind legs, forelegs braced against the train and—yes, the girls could hardly believe it!—ate out of the bucket the cook held for her.

For a few minutes no one said a word, but as the hog's hunger was partly satisfied the cook jumped down from the car door, the hog dropping down just at the same time and following him, and set the bucket on the ground. In an instant pigs came running from here and there and there was a wild scramble around that bucket!

"He's trained them—that cook has," ex-

plained the conductor as a whistle from the engine sent them all hurrying back into the train. "We pass here every other day at just this same time and that old cook—he's just as regular with his bucket of scraps as the road is running the train! And I'll declare it does seem to me those pigs are the smartest about knowing which is the dining car! They don't miss it. And that one old hog, he's got her trained to climb up to the door every time! Who's ever heard of a cook like that? And he always wants the children on the train to see it—that cook does!"

"Don't they do the queerest things in Florida!" exclaimed Mary Jane as she settled back into her seat and picked up her box of strawberries again. "First there were orstriches and alligators—'member how they slid down that shoot, Alice?"

"Do I?" cried Alice, laughing at the recol-

lection; "and remember the jelly fish and the crawdads, Mary Jane?" Mary Jane giggled.

"But who would ever have thought of pigs eating from the dining car?" continued Alice.

The ride that afternoon seemed long and the girls had almost tired of drawing pictures and counting stops and talking of the sights they had seen when the twilight brought the porter to light the lamps and the dining car man shouting, "First call for dinner! Dinner in the dining car!"

They were due to get into Jacksonville at seven, but Mrs. Merrill thought as the train was already a little late it would be better for the girls to eat a leisurely dinner on board so that the evening would be free for visiting with their father. So they strolled into the diner and ate chicken (and of *course* hashed brown potatoes!) and the very best strawberry shortcake they had ever tasted.

When the train pulled into Jacksonville at eight o'clock Mr. Merrill was nearly smothered with embraces and with a whirlwind of tales about all they had seen and done. The pretty little station was cleaned and garnished; flowerbeds had been put in order and looked very lovely under the glow of the brilliant lights and there was nothing to mar their happy reunion.

Mr. Merrill's business was finished that very afternoon and he was free to spend a day in any way the girls liked. Then the next day, they would start back home.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Alice in dismay, "only one day?"

"That's the wrong way to say it," said her father; "say all of one day—that sounds a lot more. Now where shall we spend it?"

"Oh, let's go to St. Augustine," said Mary Jane eagerly; "where is it?" And she looked around the streets of Jacksonville as though she expected to find it there.

"Oh! let's go to bed first," mimicked her father laughingly. "You remember you have to ride on the train an hour or more before you get to St. Augustine. Let's go to bed to-night and then take the first train down to St. Augustine in the morning. How does that sound?"

"Pretty fine!" replied Mary Jane with a little skip of joy.

"But Dadah," objected Alice, "I feel so celebrating this evening—having you with us and all that! I wish there was something we could do now."

"I'll tell you a secret," answered Mr. Merrill, "I feel that same way myself. Let's get into this taxi," he suggested as he hailed a passing car, "and ride up to the 'square' and get some ice cream and buy a lot of picture post cards for folks back home."

The "square" was gay enough to suit even Alice. The lights glowed brilliantly among the palms and bright flowers; the band was

playing in a stand nearby and the streets on the four sides were filled with people strolling along or making purchases at the many little shops. The Merrills were happy to find just the sorts of cards they wanted to take home. They bought a whole set—pictures of every place they had been—for Alice and another whole set for Mary Jane to keep.

"I wish I had some to take to my kindergarten, I do," said Mary Jane as she proudly slipped her set into her own little hand bag; "I'd like to take one picture to each person there."

"How many are there in your room?" asked Mr. Merrill.

"Let me see," said Mary Jane, counting out the classes, "there's ten, and nine, and fifteen, and teachers and—how many is that, Dadah?"

"It's enough for a whole set of cards," replied Mr. Merrill; "we'll get fifty and then

there will surely be enough." Mary Jane slipped the second set into her bag and began making plans that very minute about giving them to Miss Lynn.

That was the very first Mary Jane had thought of home and school since the day she had sent the alligators to Doris, more than a week ago. But now that it had once come to her mind, she found herself thinking of the pleasant kindergarten many times through the next days and making plans for what she would do when she returned home.

Early the next morning the Merrills took the train to St. Augustine and spent a happy day exploring the old fort. The tunnels and dungeons made Mary Jane shiver they were so cold and dark and slimy, but the rooms opening onto the main courtyard—the rooms where the soldiers quartered in the fort had lived—the girls thought were lovely. The walls were covered with great plants of beautiful maiden hair fern, the big-

gest and loveliest the girls had ever seen. Alice thought it would be no hardship to live there though she did admit it would likely be damp!

At the end of the day they went back to Jacksonville in time to catch the nine o'clock limited for the North.

"Just think," said Mary Jane as she slipped off her stockings and shoes and tucked them into the little hammock by the window of her berth, "I'm going to ride on this train all this night and all to-morrow and all another night and then I'll be home!"

"I wonder if it's snowing up there?" Alice was asking as she too began to undress at the same time; "wouldn't snow seem funny?"

HOME AGAIN

"LOOK! Look! Just look there, Dadah!" cried Mary Jane the second morning later as their train dashed through the familiar woods and fields of their own state. "Look what it's doing!"

The weather was indeed trying to give the returning travelers a frosty welcome. The fields were white with snow and great sheets of driving snowflakes piled up on the car window sill. The girls dressed in a hurry and went to the back platform to see the sight better. But they didn't stay long! Not out there! The cold wind sent them scurrying into the warm car in a jiffy.

The train was late because of the storm, connections were bad in the city near their home town and the ride over home was slow

and cold. So it was a rather weary and half frozen set of travelers who stiffly got off the traction line a couple of blocks from their own house.

"Ugh!" said Mrs. Merrill shivering, "I always like to come home, but I'll declare I almost dread the next hour. The house will be clammy cold and it will take a while to get the furnace going and there won't be a thing to eat."

Mr. Merrill didn't reply with his usual sympathy. He merely picked up the bag and walked off up the street—nobody guessed that he had to hurry off to keep the twinkle in his eye from being seen! Alice was glad to let him carry her bag too—her hands, used for some days to the summer heat, were cold and stiff; she could hardly manage a little swing of her arms when her mother suggested run and exercise to warm her up.

Mary Jane, hoping Doris might be at a

window, had run ahead, but the snow laden hedge made it impossible to see the house.

But when they turned past the hedge at their own gateway, every one stopped still in amazement—all but Mr. Merrill, that is! Smoke was coming from both the chimneys of their own pretty home; the gleam of a fire in the living room fireplace showed from the front windows, and Amanda swung open the front door.

"I see de limited a-goin' by," she exclaimed, with a welcoming grin, "and I jes' seys to myself 'there's my folks!' So I run and put the kettle on! Come right in and I'll have yo' a cup o' tea in a jiffy!"

"How in the world?" exclaimed Mrs. Merrill happily as she and the girls settled themselves cosily before the big, cheerful fire.

"Telegraphing, my dear," said Mr. Merrill; "you may not know it, but this country has a fairly complete telegraph system and

once in a while I think to use it!" He rubbed his hands by the blaze and smiled gayly over the success of his surprise.

"You certainly picked out the right thing to do, Dad," said Alice as Amanda wheeled the little tea wagon before the fire and Alice spied a piled up plate full of hot cinnamon toast; "it's worth the fun of going away, just to come home—it really is!"

The first thing after they were warmed and fed, Mary Jane got out her picture folders and spread them on the floor in front of the fire—folder after folder till the rug was almost covered.

"Now," she said when she had them all in place where she could see them, "I'm going to see if I saw every place I intended to."

"See if you got the worth of your money, you mean, do you?" laughed her father; "well you just go ahead and see. But if any two girls ever saw more of Florida and were away from home only fourteen days and fif-

teen nights—I'd like to see them! I'd like to know how they did it!"

And indeed, when Mary Jane and Alice began counting the pictures they had seen they realized more than even before, how very much they *had* seen. For there were not more than a dozen pictures out of that whole collection that did not look familiar. Think of that!

The next morning Mary Jane buttoned on her leggings, put on her storm rubbers and heavy coat and cap and muff and started off through the snow to school. On her arm in her own little bag she carried all the picture post cards she had brought for her friends in kindergarten. At Doris's gate she met her friends and Mr. Dana who was taking Doris to school on her sled.

"Pile on, Mary Jane," he said cordially; "always room for one more on a sled you know. Hold tight, now! Here we go!"

And away they dashed down the street and to the school.

When Miss Lynn saw the fine cards Mary Jane had brought for the pupils she at once suggested that they stop regular work for part of the morning and make a party in honor of Mary Jane's return.

"We can hang the cards all around the room at the edge of the board," she said, going to her desk to get the box of hangers; "and then as we march around and look at them, you can tell us about each picture."

Mary Jane and pretty Miss Amerion, the assistant, set busily to work and by the time the bell rang a few minutes later all the pictures were hung in place. It was lots of fun to march around the room at the head of the class and tell interesting things about the pictures. She told about the fire on the boat and about riding the ponies and seeing the queer stoves in the orange orchard and every-

thing she could think of. And she didn't wonder a bit that the boys and girls (and teachers too) laughed when she told them about their wild ride in the auto in chase of a boat.

"What did you think was the strangest thing you saw, Mary Jane?" asked Miss Lynn when Mary Jane had finished.

"Well—" Mary Jane hesitated. She thought quickly of the jelly fish, the chameleon, the queer sword fish she had seen swimming in Clear River, but none of those seemed quite as queer as the big old alligators that looked so like logs.

"I think the alligators were the queerest," she said decidedly, and she told how she had been fooled into thinking one was a real log.

Then suddenly she happened to think. "I sent Doris an alligator. I sent her two of 'em. Couldn't she bring them to school so everybody could see? They were just

baby ones of course, but they were funny all the same."

The whole school looked over to Doris and saw the poor little girl flushed with embarrassment and hanging her head.

"Have you got them, dear?" asked Miss Lynn encouragingly; "maybe we could wrap them up warm and snug and bring them to school to-morrow."

"Well, you see—" Doris hesitated and then blurted out suddenly, "we had 'em two days and then they both crawled down the register and they haven't ever come back—not yet they haven't."

"They must have thought this country too cold," said Miss Lynn; "but don't you worry. We've nice pictures to look at and if the alligators ever come back you can bring them to us then." And Doris was comforted.

For two months after they came home from Florida, Mary Jane went to kinder-

garten and played with her little friends and helped about the house just as she had loved to do before they went away for those wonderful two weeks. The piled up snows of winter melted into little dirty piles that finally slipped off into the ground without anybody noticing when they went. The buds on the lilac bush began to swell and two gay robins appeared in the garden to announce that spring was coming.

One warm noon time Mary Jane stopped on the front steps to make into a chain the first gay dandelions of the season she had picked on the way home from school.

"See, Dadah!" she exclaimed to her father as he came up the walk, "I got seven and I making them into a chain for mother—won't she be pleased?"

"Indeed she will," replied Mr. Merrill, but Mary Jane noticed that his voice sounded as though he was thinking of some-

thing else. "Do you like it so very well here, Mary Jane?" he asked and he waved his hand out toward the yard.

"Why yes, Dadah," replied Mary Jane, puzzled at his manner, "don't you?"

"Of course," said Mr. Merrill, "but would you like to live somewhere else, do you think?"

Mary Jane looked out over the pretty front yard, where the grass was so green and the crocuses were peeking up here and there. "Well," she said, "I like it here and I don't know what you mean. But I think I'd like it anywhere you and mother and Alice were."

"That's my girl!" exclaimed her father as he hugged her close. "Come here, folks," he added as Alice came up the walk just then and Mrs. Merrill opened the door to greet them; "I'll tell you the news." He pulled a yellow telegram from his pocket. "See

that? That means new work and a promotion. And it means that we move to Chicago."

"Leave here?" exclaimed Mrs. Merrill.

"Leave here inside of a month," he replied. "Leave here and live in the big city."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mary Jane, "go on the train again! Hashed brown potatoes! And have a moving wagon and boxes of things just like other folks! Oh me! Goody! Is it really for true?"

And if you want to read about all the fun Mary Jane had getting acquainted with the big city, exploring its parks and going to school, you will find it all told in

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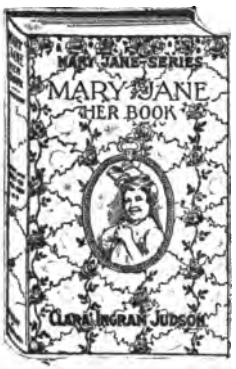

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